

# Staying cool in a heatwave



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Tips to keep you cool  
when it's very hot  
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*Health &  
wellbeing*



*Age UK is the new force combining  
Age Concern and Help the Aged.*

*With almost 120 years of combined  
history to draw on, we are bringing  
together our talents, services and  
solutions to do more to enrich  
the lives of people in later life.*

Age UK is the new force combining

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# *Introduction*

We all look forward to ‘a good summer’, even though we’re quite often disappointed! But there are odd occasions when very high temperatures and humidity can present a risk to health, and older people can be particularly susceptible to heat-related illness.

Inside you’ll find a few helpful tips on how to protect yourself from the heat, how to recognise heat-related illness and what to do when someone shows signs of it.

# Avoiding heat-related illness

- **Keep out of the heat.** Stay inside during the hottest time of the day – late morning to mid-afternoon. If you do go out, wear a hat and keep to the shade as much as possible. It's very important to use sun screen of at least factor 15.
- If you are travelling by car or public transport always **take a bottle of water.**
- **Avoid strenuous activity** and limit activities like housework and gardening to the early morning or evening when it's cooler.
- **When inside, try to stay in the coolest parts of your home.** Keep curtains and blinds closed in rooms that catch the sun. Remember that lights generate heat. Keep windows shut while it's cooler inside than out and open them when it gets hotter inside. If it's safe, you could leave a window open at night when it's cooler. Fans can help sweat evaporate but do not cool the air itself.
- **Wear loose, lightweight, light-coloured cotton clothing.**
- **Take cool baths or showers.**
- **Splash your face with cold water** or place a damp cloth or scarf on the back of your neck to help you cool off.
- **Drink lots of fluid** – even if you're not thirsty. Limit drinks with caffeine (like coffee and cola) and avoid alcohol as it can make dehydration worse.
- **Eat normally but try to have more cold foods,** particularly salads and fruit as they contain a lot of water.

## *Dehydration and overheating*

Extreme heat and humidity can cause you to dehydrate and your body to overheat.

Watch out for certain signs: particularly for muscle cramps in your arms, legs or stomach, mild confusion, weakness or sleep problems. If you have any of these, rest in a cool place and drink plenty of fluids. Seek medical advice if your symptoms persist or worsen.



# Heat exhaustion and heatstroke

The symptoms of heat exhaustion include headaches, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, pale skin, heavy sweating and a high temperature.

## **If you have any of these symptoms you must:**

- find a cool place and loosen tight clothes
- drink plenty of water or fruit juice
- sponge yourself with cold water or have a cool shower.

## **If you're having difficulty, or your symptoms persist for several hours, seek medical advice.**

Heatstroke can develop if heat exhaustion is left untreated - but it can also develop suddenly and without warning.

The symptoms of heatstroke include hot and red skin, headaches, nausea, intense thirst, raised temperature, confusion, aggression and loss of consciousness.

## **Heatstroke is a life-threatening condition.**

### **So if you or someone else shows symptoms:**

- call 999 immediately or 112 if you are in the European Union (you can call 112 from a mobile for free). If you have a community alarm, press the button on your pendant to call for help.
- while waiting for the ambulance, follow the advice given above for heat exhaustion but do not try to give fluids to anyone who is unconscious.

## Further information

- If you live alone consider asking a relative or friend to visit or phone to check that you are not having difficulties during periods of extreme heat.
- If you know a neighbour who lives alone, check they are ok.
- If a heat wave is on its way or the weather is hot for several days, listen to local radio so that you know the latest local advice. Check for weather forecasts and temperature warnings on TV and radio, and online at [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)
- If you have breathing problems or a heart condition your symptoms might get worse when it's very hot. Contact your GP for advice.
- For advice about heat-related illness call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or visit the NHS Choices website at [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk) (in Wales, visit [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)). In Scotland, call NHS 24 on 08454 24 24 24 or visit [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

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## What should I do now?

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For more information on the issues covered in this leaflet, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit **[www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing)**

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *Health services*
- *Going into hospital*
- *Staying steady*

Age UK offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life, for more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK/Age Concern\* are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



\*Many local Age Concerns are changing their name to Age UK.

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