

Staying cool in a heatwave

Tips to keep you cool
when it's very hot

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.***

***The Age UK family includes Age Cymru,
Age NI and Age Scotland. There are
also more than 160 local Age UKs.***

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Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this leaflet is correct. However, things do change, so it is always a good idea to seek expert advice on your personal situation.

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Introduction

We all look forward to ‘a good summer’, even though we’re quite often disappointed! But very high temperatures and humidity can present a risk to health, and older people can be particularly susceptible to heat-related illness. It’s important not to get caught out during unseasonably warm weather too. Temperatures can soar as early as April.

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.

Key



This symbol indicates where information differs for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



This symbol indicates who to contact for the next steps you need to take.

Avoiding heat-related illness

- Keep out of the heat. Don't spend long periods sitting or working outside during the hottest time of the day – late morning to mid-afternoon. If you do go out, wear a hat and stay in the shade as much as possible.
- If you're 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 cool (not very 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 aren’t thirsty. If you usually rely on drinks with caffeine in them, such as tea, coffee or cola, limit these and have water first or instead. Avoid alcohol as it can make dehydration worse.
- Eat normally – even if you aren’t hungry, you need a normal diet to replace salt losses from sweating. In addition, try to have more cold foods, particularly salads and fruit, as they contain a lot of water.

Looking after your skin

It’s very important to ensure that your skin isn’t exposed to the sun for long periods, as this can lead to sunburn and make you more susceptible to skin cancer. Whenever you go out in the sun, use sunscreen of at least sun protection factor (SPF) 15 with four or five stars, applying it generously and topping up regularly if you’re going to be outside for a while. The sunscreen’s star rating shows its ability to protect your skin from damage and premature ageing.

Get to know your skin type – whether you burn easily can influence the strength of sunscreen you should use and how long you can be outside in the sun without burning. But remember that anyone can develop skin cancer, so it’s important to protect your skin whatever your skin type. When you’re using sunscreen, remember to apply it to your ears if they’re exposed, as well as your arms, any bald patches on your head, and any other uncovered part of your body. A hat will protect your head, face, ears and eyes. Choose sunglasses that have a CE mark, UV400 label or a statement that they offer 100 per cent UV (ultraviolet) protection. When the weather is hot, your skin may also feel drier than usual. Using moisturiser can help keep your skin healthy.

Sun exposure and vitamin D

Although it is essential to protect your skin, some exposure to the sun without sunscreen is important for the production of vitamin D, so don't avoid the sun altogether. It should be enough to go outside regularly during the summer months for about 10–15 minutes during the middle of the day. The more of your skin that is exposed, the better your chance of making enough vitamin D. You don't need your skin to redden or burn to make enough.

There are some food sources of vitamin D – salmon, sardines and other oily fish, eggs and fortified spreads – but sunshine is the major source for most people.

The Government recommends vitamin D supplements for some groups of the population including people aged 65 and over. If you think you could be at risk of not getting enough vitamin D, particularly if you are housebound or cover your skin for cultural reasons, raise this with your GP. Always speak to your GP before starting to take a vitamin supplement or over-the-counter medicine on a daily basis.

what next?

If you have moles or brown patches on your skin, they usually remain harmless. However, if they bleed, or change size, shape or colour, show them to your GP without delay. For more information on checking moles, visit the Cancer Research UK SunSmart website at www.sunsmart.org.uk

Dehydration and overheating

Extreme heat and dry conditions 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

Heat exhaustion

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

If you have any of these symptoms you must, if at all possible:

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

If you're having difficulty, or your symptoms persist for several hours, call your GP or NHS Direct for advice.

Heatstroke

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, a high 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 on page 6 for heat exhaustion, but do not try to give fluids to anyone who is unconscious.

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



‘I still enjoy the nice weather but I’m much more careful now. On hot days I only stay outside for a little while at a time.’



After Eva felt hot and dizzy in the garden one day, she started to take more care in the sun.

‘I’d never really thought sitting out in the sun could be a problem, until I was out for too long on a very hot day. I started to feel a bit dizzy and I had a headache, so I went back indoors. Luckily my neighbour was with me as we’d been sitting in the garden together, so she got me a glass of water. After that I felt a lot better. My neighbour wondered if I’d been dehydrated.

‘A lot of people think it doesn’t get warm enough in this country for us to need to take care, so they only look after themselves when they’re on holiday. But wherever you are you can get ill if you have too much sun, and you need to be careful even when the sky looks hazy. I still enjoy the nice weather but I’m much more careful now. On hot days I only stay outside for a little while at a time, and if I don’t want to be cooped up indoors I just sit in the shade.’



What else can you do?

- If you live alone, consider asking a relative or friend to visit or phone to check that you're not having difficulties during periods of extreme heat.
- If you know a neighbour who lives alone, check regularly that they are OK.
- If a heatwave is on its way or the weather is hot for several days, listen to local radio so that you know the latest advice for your area. Check for weather forecasts and temperature warnings on TV and radio, and online at 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.



In Wales, you can get a free UV Safe card from NHS Direct Wales. These wallet-sized cards show the level of sun exposure to warn against harmful UV rays. Call NHS Direct Wales or email ppi@ambulance.wales.nhs.uk to get one.

Useful organisations

Age UK

Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged. We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.

www.ageuk.org.uk

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact

Age Cymru: 0800 169 65 65

www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact

Age NI: 0808 808 7575

www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact

Age Scotland: 0845 125 9732

www.agescotland.org.uk

Cancer Research UK SunSmart campaign

Information about skin cancer and sun protection.

www.sunsmart.org.uk

Met Office

Check your local weather forecast and get advice on managing in severe weather conditions.

www.metoffice.gov.uk

NHS Choices

Information on conditions, treatments, local services and healthy living.

www.nhs.uk

In Wales, visit www.wales.nhs.uk

In Scotland, visit NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk

Tel: 0800 22 44 88

NHS Direct

NHS 24-hour helpline for advice if you feel unwell. Can give advice on heat-related illness.

Call 0845 46 47 if you live in England.

Call 0845 44 24 24 if you live in Scotland (NHS 24)

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

In Scotland, visit www.nhs24.com

NHS Direct Wales

Free 24-hour health advice and information service for people living in Wales.

Tel: 0845 46 47

www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

You may be interested in other guides in this range

- Bereavement
- Caring for your eyes
- Going into hospital
- Going solo
- Health services
- Healthy eating
- Healthy living
- Managing incontinence
- Staying steady
- Winter wrapped up



To order any of our **free** publications, please call Age UK Advice free on:

0800 169 65 65

www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing

What should I do now?

For more information on the issues covered in this guide, 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

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

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *Health services*
- *Healthy living*
- *Staying steady*

The Age UK Group 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 are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.

