

Staying cool in a heatwave

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Tips to keep you cool
when it's very hot
.....



Information and advice you need to help you love later life.

We're Age UK and our goal is to enable older people to love later life.

We are passionate about affirming that your later years can be fulfilling years. Whether you're enjoying your later life or going through tough times, we're here to help you make the best of your life.

Our network includes Age Cymru, Age NI, Age Scotland, Age International and more than 160 local partners.

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What this guide is about

We all look forward to a good summer, even though we're sometimes 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 to remember that high temperatures in the UK can be just as dangerous as high temperatures abroad. And don't get caught out during unseasonably warm weather, as temperatures can soar as early as April.

Inside this guide, you'll find some helpful tips on how to protect yourself from the heat, how to recognise heat-related illness and what to do if someone shows signs of struggling to deal with high temperatures.

As far as possible, the information given in this guide is applicable across the UK.

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

- Although some direct sun exposure is essential for the production of vitamin D (see page 6) avoid spending long periods outside during the hottest time of the day, which is from 11am to 3pm. If you do go out, wear a broad-brimmed 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 such as housework and gardening to the morning or evening.
- When inside, try to stay in the coolest parts of your home. Keep curtains and blinds closed in rooms that catch the sun and remember that lights generate heat so turn them off. Keep windows shut while it's cooler inside than outside. Fans can help sweat evaporate but they don't cool the air itself, so don't rely on them to keep you well in the heat.
- Wear loose, lightweight, light-coloured, cotton clothing.
- Splash your face with cool (not very cold) water or place a damp cloth on the back of your neck to help you cool off.
- Drink lots of fluid. Aim for 6 to 8 glasses a day, more if it's very hot. If you usually rely on drinks with caffeine in them, limit these and have water or decaf drinks 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 loss from sweating. Try to have more salads and fruit, as these contain a lot of water.
- Speak to your GP or pharmacist about how your health or medications may be affected by extreme heat. Check the storage instructions of your medicines – most need to be stored in a cool area, and away from direct sunlight.

Looking after your skin

It's very important to ensure 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.

Use sunscreen of at least SPF15 (sun protection factor 15) with four or five stars, applying it generously half an hour before going out in the sun. The sunscreen's star rating shows its ability to protect your skin from damage and premature ageing. Reapply sunscreen at least every two hours and, if you've been in water, reapply it when you are dry.

Get to know your skin type – whether you burn easily influences the strength of sunscreen you should use and how long you can be outside in the sun without burning.


Remember anyone can develop skin cancer, so it's important to protect your skin whatever your skin type.

When using sunscreen, apply it to your ears if they're exposed, as well as your face, neck, arms, back of the hands, any bald patches on your head and any other uncovered part of your body.

Wear a broad brimmed hat to protect your head, face, ears and eyes.

Wear sunglasses that have a CE mark, UV400 label or a statement that they offer 100 per cent UV (ultraviolet) protection. Speak to an optician about prescription sunglasses or special shades that fit over your ordinary prescription glasses.

When the weather is hot, your skin may also feel drier than usual. Using moisturiser can help keep your skin healthy.

-  In Wales, you can get a free UV Safe card from NHS Direct Wales. These wallet-sized cards show the level of sun exposure and warn against harmful UV rays. Call NHS Direct Wales (see page 14) or email ppi.team@wales.nhs.uk to get one.

what next?

Check your skin every few months for any new moles or for changes in existing moles. It's useful to have someone else check areas on your body you can't see easily, such as your back. Moles or brown patches usually remain harmless and rarely develop into skin cancer. However, if they bleed or change size, shape or colour, show them to your GP without delay. Visit the Cancer Research UK website (see page 14) for more information about sun, skin types, UV and cancer.

Sun exposure and vitamin D

Although it's important to protect your skin, some direct skin exposure to the sun is essential for production of vitamin D, so don't avoid the sun altogether. You need vitamin D to build and maintain strong bones. Sunshine is the major source of vitamin D for many people.

There are food sources of vitamin D – salmon, sardines and other oily fish, eggs, and fortified spreads. However it's difficult to get enough vitamin D from diet alone.

The exact amount of sun exposure needed to make enough vitamin D depends on your skin type, the season, where you are in the UK and how much skin is exposed.

In spring and summer, most people can get enough vitamin D from short periods of daily sun exposure. Try to go outside every day without sunscreen for short periods from March to October, exposing at least your forearms and hands to the sun. Don't let your skin redden or burn. The more skin you expose, the better your chance of making enough vitamin D.

In autumn and winter, the sun isn't strong enough to produce vitamin D and most people won't get enough from foods, so it's recommended that adults of all ages consider taking a vitamin D supplement of 10 µg daily at this time.

You may need a supplement all year round if you spend most of the day indoors, have darker skin, or cover your skin for cultural reasons.

**what
next?**

Speak to your GP or pharmacist if you think you aren't getting enough vitamin D.



Although it's important to protect your skin, **some direct exposure to the sun is essential** for production of **vitamin D**, so don't avoid the sun altogether.

Dehydration and overheating

Extreme heat and dry conditions can cause you to dehydrate and your body to overheat. It's important to make sure you eat a balanced diet to help your body replace any salt you lose by sweating. You should also drink plenty of fluids (see page 3). And remember, it's possible you may become dehydrated before feeling thirsty. Take particular care and speak to your GP or practice nurse if you have heart failure or take medication that affects water retention.

Watch out for certain signs, particularly 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.

Drink lots of fluid. Aim for **6 to 8 glasses a day**, more if it's very hot.

Heat exhaustion and heatstroke

Heat exhaustion

Symptoms include headaches, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, intense thirst, heavy sweating and a fast pulse.

If you have any of these symptoms you must try to:

- find a cool place to lie down
- loosen tight clothes and remove unnecessary clothing
- drink plenty of water or fruit juice
- sponge yourself with cool water or have a cool shower.

what next?

Your symptoms should improve within 30 minutes. If you're feeling better, but still have concerns, call NHS 111 or your GP. In Wales contact NHS Direct Wales; in Scotland contact NHS 24; and in Northern Ireland visit NI Direct (see page 14)



Heatstroke

Heatstroke is a serious condition that develops if heat exhaustion is left untreated, but can also develop suddenly and without warning.

More severe symptoms of heatstroke include confusion, disorientation, seizures 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), or if you have a personal alarm, press the button on your pendant to call for help
- while waiting for the ambulance, follow advice given for heat exhaustion, but do not try to give fluids to anyone who is unconscious.

Eva enjoys the warm weather but never realised how dangerous the sun could be.

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 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 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 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 cover up and sit in the shade.'



‘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**.’

What else can you do?

- If you live alone, consider asking a relative or friend to visit or phone to check 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 for the latest advice for your area. Check for weather forecasts and temperature warnings on TV and radio, and online at www.metoffice.gov.uk.
- Keep basic food items and essential medications at home so you don't have to go out during a heatwave.
- Bacteria can multiply quickly in hot weather, which increases the risk of food poisoning. When you buy chilled food, take it home in a cool bag and put it in your fridge as soon as you get home. You should use a cool bag if you take food out for a picnic. Don't leave food in a warm room or in the sun.
- If you have breathing problems or a heart condition, your symptoms might get worse when it's very hot. Contact your GP practice in advance for advice, to make sure you're well prepared.

Useful organisations

Age UK

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 022 3444

www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact

Age NI: 0808 808 7575

www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact

Age Scotland: 0800 124 4222

www.agescotland.org.uk

The evidence sources used to create this guide are available on request. Contact resources@ageuk.org.uk

Cancer Research UK

Provides information about cancer, including skin cancer and sun protection.

Tel: 0808 800 4040

www.cancerresearchuk.org

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 **NHS Direct Wales**

Tel: 0845 46 47

www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

In Scotland, visit **NHS Inform**

Tel: 0800 22 44 88

www.nhsinform.co.uk

In Northern Ireland, visit **NI Direct**

www.nidirect.gov.uk

NHS 111

Free NHS 24-hour helpline for advice on urgent but non-life-threatening symptoms.

Tel: 111

In Scotland, contact **NHS 24**

Tel: 111

www.nhs24.com

Can you help Age UK?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: **Freepost Age UK Supporter Services**. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 87 87 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/donate If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

We'd[†] like to let you know about the vital work we do for older people, our fundraising appeals and opportunities to support us, as well as the Age UK products and services you can buy.

Personal details

Title:	Initials:	Surname:
Address:		
Postcode:		

We will never sell your data and we promise to keep your details safe and secure.

Please tick here if you **do not** wish to receive communications by post.

You can change your mind at any time by telephoning us on 0800 169 8787 or by writing to Supporter Services at the registered address below.

Your gift

I would like to make a gift of: £

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Age UK

Card payment

MasterCard Visa CAF CharityCard

I wish to pay by (please tick) Maestro American Express

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Signature **X**

Expiry date

/

Gift aid declaration

Yes, I want Age UK and its partner organisations* to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations. I am a UK tax payer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Date __/__/__ * Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI



[†] We, includes the charity, its charitable and trading subsidiaries, and national charities (Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI). Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA. **Age UK provides a range of services and your gift will go wherever the need is the greatest.**

Supporting the work of Age UK

Age UK aims to enable all older people to love later life. We provide vital services, support, information and advice to thousands of older people across the UK.

In order to offer free information guides like this one, Age UK relies on the generosity of its supporters. If you would like to help us, here are a few ways you could get involved:

1 Make a donation
To make a donation to Age UK, simply complete the enclosed donation form, call us on **0800 169 8787** or visit **www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved**

2 Donate items to our shops
By donating an unwanted item to one of our shops, you can help generate vital funds to support our work. To find your nearest Age UK shop, visit **www.ageuk.org.uk** and enter your postcode into the ‘What does Age UK do in your area?’ search function. Alternatively, call us on **0800 169 8787**

3 Leave a gift in your will
Nearly half the money we receive from supporters come from gifts left in wills. To find out more about how you could help in this way, please call the Age UK legacy team on **020 3033 1421** or email **legacies@ageuk.org.uk**

Thank you!

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 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**.

