

## KEEP COOL IN THE SUMMER

During the sweltering days of summer, many seniors encounter the challenge of keeping cool and hydrated to avoid potential health problems and emergencies. Dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke are three dangers of hot weather. The following information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes these conditions:



Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature: the body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided. Warning signs of heat stroke vary but may include the following: an extremely high body temperature (above 103°F); red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating); rapid, strong pulse; throbbing headache; dizziness; nausea; confusion; and/ or unconsciousness.

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are elders, those with high blood pressure, and those working or exercising in a hot environment. The warning signs of heat exhaustion include the following: heavy sweating; paleness; muscle cramps; tiredness; weakness dizziness; headache; nausea or vomiting; and fainting. The skin may be cool and moist. The pulse rate will be fast and weak, and breathing will be fast and shallow. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke. See medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour.



The best thing is to prevent these heat-related illnesses from happening. Remember to keep cool and use common sense. Drink plenty of fluid, replace salts and minerals, wear appropriate clothing and sunscreen, pace yourself, stay cool indoors, schedule outdoor activities carefully, use a buddy system, monitor those at risk, and adjust to the environment. During hot weather you will need to drink more liquid than your thirst indicates. Increase your fluid intake, regardless of your activity level (unless your doctor or a medical condition prohibits you from increasing fluid intake). Avoid drinks containing alcohol because they will actually cause you to lose more fluid.



Wear as little clothing as possible when you are at home. Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. In the hot sun, a wide-brimmed hat will provide shade and keep the head cool. If you must go outdoors, be sure to apply sunscreen 30 minutes prior to going out and continue to reapply according to the package directions. Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids. It also causes pain and damages the skin. Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath or moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off. Air conditioning is the strongest protective factor against heat-related illness. Exposure to air conditioning for even a few hours a day will reduce the risk for heat-related illness. Consider visiting a shopping mall or public library for a few hours. If you see any signs of severe heat stress, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the affected person. Do the following:

- Get the person to a shady area.
- Cool the person rapidly, using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the person with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101°–102°F
- If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.
- Do not give the person alcohol to drink.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

For more information contact Gayle Thieme, Director of the Wellesley Council on Aging, telephone: 781-235-3961, website: [www.wellesleyma.gov/coa](http://www.wellesleyma.gov/coa)

Or the Wellesley Health Department at 781-235-0135, website: [www.wellesleyma.gov/health](http://www.wellesleyma.gov/health)