

Summer Wise

Getting through a heat wave

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Independent Age provides advice to help people claim benefits, access social care and stay independent at home. Our local volunteers provide friendship visits and calls for lonely older people. To find out how Independent Age can help you, call us FREE on **0800 319 6789** or visit **independentage.org**



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The information in this factsheet applies to England only. If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru (0800 022 3444, agecymru.org.uk) for information and advice. In Scotland, contact Age Scotland (0800 470 8090, agescotland.org.uk). In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI (0808 808 7575, ageni.org).

While the summer may lift our spirits, older people can suffer adverse effects on their health during the hot weather and can be more vulnerable to illnesses such as heatstroke, heat exhaustion and dehydration. Changes in our bodies mean we're less likely to notice when we feel hot, take longer to cool down and are less likely to feel thirsty.

Read our top tips for keeping cool in the sun. Some of them may just seem like common sense, but they can make a big difference to your wellbeing.

Stay hydrated

- Drink more fluids than normal in hot weather. Have cool drinks like water and fruit juice and limit the amount of drinks with caffeine in them (tea, coffee, cola etc.). Avoid alcohol as it can dehydrate you.
- Many older people stop drinking from late afternoon to prevent having to get up in the night. Avoid doing this as you risk becoming dehydrated.
- Try to eat cold foods, especially salads and fruits like watermelon as they contain a lot of water.
- The symptoms of dehydration can include dizziness, thirst, headaches and tiredness.

Ongoing dehydration can lead to urine infections, muscle damage, constipation and kidney stones.

Dress for the weather

- Wear a hat and sunscreen of at least SPF 15 with four or five star UVA protection to protect your skin. Apply sunscreen generously half an hour before going out and then again just before you go into the sun. Reapply it at least every two to three hours.
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes. Choose a pair with a CE mark, UV400 label or statement that they provide 100% UV protection.
- Loose-fitting, light-coloured cotton clothes are best for staying cool in hot weather.

Know the facts about your medication

- If you're on medication that affects the amount of fluid you're allowed to drink, then get advice from your GP on what to do in hot weather.
- Some medication can affect your body temperature and your ability to cope in hot weather. Talk to your GP or pharmacist about how best to manage this.

Keep cool

- Avoid too much activity, especially at the hottest times of the day (11am to 3pm). Save essential housework or gardening for early morning or late evening.
- If you're going out, take a bottle of water with you.
- Taking a cool bath or shower, or just splashing cool water over your face and arms, will help you to cool down. A damp cloth on the back of your neck can help too.
- Be prepared before hot weather arrives. Listen out for heatwave warnings on television and on the radio, or check the Met Office website (metoffice.gov.uk). Keep a thermometer in a commonly used room out of direct sunlight.

Steps to take around the house

- If it's cooler indoors than outdoors, then stay inside. You can help keep your rooms cooler by closing the windows and pulling the curtains to keep the heat out.
- Buy a good quality electric fan. Make sure it's positioned in a safe place with no trailing wires. Fans can sometimes cause dehydration, so don't point it directly at you and regularly drink water.

- If it's still very hot at home, try going to your local library, cinema or other air-conditioned place.

Keep an eye out for worrying symptoms

Heat exhaustion is where you become very hot and start to lose water or salt from your body. Symptoms can include:

- tiredness
- nausea
- a headache
- feeling faint or dizzy
- sweating heavily
- intense thirst
- muscle cramps
- a fast pulse
- urinating less often and having darker urine than usual.

If you have these symptoms, you should quickly go to a cool place, drink plenty of water and remove any extra layers of clothes. Call your GP or NHS 111 if symptoms persist.

Heatstroke is serious and can develop if heat exhaustion isn't treated. More severe symptoms

can include confusion, disorientation, fits and loss of consciousness. Call 999 immediately if anyone shows these symptoms. While waiting for the ambulance, move the person somewhere cool, give them water if they're conscious and shower their skin with cool water or cover them in damp towels.

If you're worried about any health problems or you feel unwell, always contact your GP. You can also contact NHS Direct (111, nhs.uk) who can take the details of your symptoms and advise on what to do next – whether to call 999 immediately, book an appointment with your GP or visit a pharmacist in your own time. It's also a good idea to tell friends, family or a neighbour if you're feeling unwell.

This factsheet has been put together by Independent Age's expert advisers. It is not a full explanation of the law and is aimed at people aged over 60.

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