

BEAT THE HEAT

Comfort Keepers' Summer Tips for Seniors

Every summer, thousands of Americans suffer from heat stroke, heat exhaustion and dehydration. And each year, an average of 300 people in the United States dies from heat-related illnesses, according to reports from the Center for Disease Control.

Seniors are more susceptible to heat-related illnesses as their bodies do not effectively cool down and it takes longer to recover when they get overheated. As the temperature starts to rise, it is important to take a moment to think about ways to Beat the Heat and avoid unnecessary illness.

Below are five customized tips that can help you or someone you love battle the heat, sun and humidity, which are unavoidable throughout the summer months:

- **Check homes for proper ventilation** – Excessive heat, when temperatures and humidity reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit or above, can be dangerous, especially to those who are home without air conditioners or fans. Many seniors will sacrifice a cool breeze from an open window due to security concerns. Inexpensive safety latches are available for windows that allow the air to circulate, but also prevent the window from being completely opened from the outside. Check with your local hardware store for options.
- **Seek relief from the heat in public buildings that are air-conditioned** – Not every senior has air conditioning in their home and there is a point at which fans can't combat the summer heat. When this occurs, visit public places such as local shopping malls, libraries, restaurants, or visit with friends or family for a welcome break from the heat.
- **Beware of medications and/or senior diets that can increase risk** – Hot weather can accelerate dehydration, especially in people who are taking medications that have the side effects of fluid and electrolyte loss. Many medications, particularly antibiotics and diuretics can block the body's natural ability to cope with the sun and heat. You should always check with a pharmacist or doctor to ensure that medications will not cause you or your loved ones to be more susceptible to heat-related problems. Also, if seniors are on a low carbohydrate diet, be sure they drink plenty of fluids, as the additional proteins in this diet can cause the body to heat up more quickly.
- **Plan ahead for outdoor activities or events** – During hot weather, everyone, especially seniors, should wear loose fitting, cool, light-colored clothing, and a hat or cap. Whenever possible, try to stay in the shade and be sure to use a high SPF sun block (30+) in order to protect a senior's sensitive skin.
- **Drink plenty of replenishing fluids** – Alcoholic beverages and caffeine should be avoided since they can cause dehydration. Water is a great option, but does not effectively replace the potassium and sodium (electrolytes) that we lose when perspiring. Popular "sports drinks" such as Gatorade, Powerade and/or inexpensive homemade substitutes (see recipe below) are great choices for rehydrating the body.

Rehydration Drink*

Measure all ingredients precisely. Small variations can make the drink less effective or even harmful. Mix the following:

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| 1 quart (950 ml) water | ½ teaspoon (2.5 g) table salt | ½ teaspoon (2.5 g) baking soda |
| 3 to 4 tablespoons (45 to 60 g) sugar | | If available, ¼ teaspoon (1.25 g) salt substitute (such as "Lite Salt") |

* Do not give this homemade drink to children under age 12.

Source: www.webmd.com

Potential Symptoms

Always be on guard for symptoms of heat exhaustion, which include pale, cold or clammy skin, extreme thirst, light-headedness, fainting, mild nausea, vomiting, and excessive sweating. Signs of heat stroke include hot, dry skin, a fast, strong pulse, confusion, and a body temperature of 104 degrees or higher. If a person exhibits signs of heat stroke, this is a serious medical emergency and 911 or your local emergency medical team should be contacted.

The good news is heat-related illnesses and injuries are preventable. If you understand the signs and watch out for the symptoms, you too can beat the heat this summer season.

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