

Heatwave: how to cope in hot weather

Most of us welcome hot weather, but when it's too hot for too long, there are health risks, make sure it does not harm you or anyone you know.

Why is a heatwave a problem?

The main risks posed by a heatwave are:

- not drinking enough water (dehydration)
- overheating, which can make symptoms worse for people who already have problems with their heart or breathing
- heat exhaustion and heatstroke

Heatwaves can affect any of us, but those most at risk are:

- People >65 years old
- People with underlying health conditions including problems with heart or lung conditions, diabetes, kidney disease, Parkinson's disease or some mental health conditions
- Those who may find it hard to keep cool – babies and the very young, the bed bound, or people with Alzheimer's disease
- Those with drug or alcohol addictions
- Those who live on their own or in a care home
- People who spend a lot of time outside or in hot places – those who live in a top floor flat, the homeless or those whose jobs are outside.

Tips for coping in hot weather:

Reduce the risk of dehydration:

- Make sure you have enough water to drink. It is important to stay hydrated, an adult needs approximately 2 litres of liquid over 24 hours. This may be less for those with medical conditions
- Drink more fluids when you feel any dehydration symptoms. The best fluids to drink are water or oral rehydration sachets – chat to your pharmacist about how to use these safely.
- You might like to leave drinks in the fridge
- Look out for those who may struggle to keep themselves cool and hydrated – older people, those with underlying health conditions and those who live alone are particularly at risk

Keep cool:

- Keep out the heat, close curtains on rooms that face the sun to keep indoor spaces cooler and remember it may be cooler outdoors than indoors
- Minimise unnecessary heating - turn off central heating, electrical equipment and lights that are not needed
- Use natural ventilation to increase air flow through buildings wherever possible such as open windows when the air feels cooler outside than inside and where it is safe and secure to do so
- If you are using air conditioning, make sure it is using a fresh air supply, which is important to prevent spread of Covid-19
- Electric fans need to be used with caution, as they may not be safe for higher temperatures and should not be used where a person may be incubating or a case of Covid-19
- Follow coronavirus social distancing guidance and wash your hands regularly
- Drink plenty of fluids and avoid excess alcohol
- Never leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle, especially infants, young children or animals
- Try to keep out of the sun, walk in the shade, apply sunscreen regularly and wear a wide brimmed hat, if you have to go out in the heat
- Avoid exercising in the hottest parts of the day

- Make sure you take water with you, if you are travelling
- Evaporative cooling – dampening your skin may help keep you cool
- If you are going into open water to cool down, take care and follow local safety advice.

When to get medical help:

If you or someone else feels unwell with a high temperature during hot weather, it may be heat exhaustion or heatstroke.

Contact your GP or A&E if you are unwell and especially if you

- are confused and disorientated
- feel very dizzy
- have not been to the toilet all day
- feel like your heart is beating fast
- have fits (seizures)
- are caring for someone who is drowsy or difficult to wake

These can be signs of serious dehydration that need urgent treatment.