



Summer Heat Can Bring Danger to Seniors

When the temperature soars and humidity rises, it's time for seniors to take precautions to avoid heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Seniors are prone to heat-related illness because they are more likely to have chronic illnesses and take medications, and the body's natural mechanisms for maintaining normal temperature slow down.

The primary cause of heat exhaustion is dehydration and a loss of electrolytes such as sodium. During summer heat, **drink even though you don't feel like it; you can't count on your thirst mechanism to prompt you.** Early symptoms of heat exhaustion can sneak up on you, sometimes several hours after dehydration occurs. Serious problems develop when symptoms are ignored and additional fluids are not taken right away. Heat exhaustion symptoms include:

- Body temperature usually normal or only slightly elevated
- Dry mouth
- Fatigue, weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea, sometimes vomiting
- Weak and rapid pulse
- Sweating
- Cool, clammy, pale skin

To treat heat exhaustion, first get out of the sun and into a cool place. Drink fluids, but not too fast, or you may become nauseous. Loosen clothing and rest. Eat salty snacks if you can use salt.

Heat stroke can follow heat exhaustion, *or* it can develop quickly and independently if your core body temperature rises too high. Heat stroke is an extremely dangerous condition and can occur 10-15 minutes after first symptoms. If treatment is not given immediately, damage can occur to internal organs, which can be fatal. Symptoms of heat stroke include:

- Very high body temperature (103 degrees or higher)
- Hot, dry, red skin
- No sweating
- Disorientation, hallucinations, delirium
- Rapid breathing and fast pulse, then slow breathing and weak pulse
- Convulsions
- Loss of consciousness

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Call 911 or get to a hospital emergency room at once.

Immediate care for a heat stroke victim includes these steps:

- Move the person to a cool place indoors or in the shade outdoors
- Lower body temperature as soon as possible
- Remove clothing and wrap the person in a wet sheet, or wet their cotton clothing
- Fan the person manually or with an electric fan
- Place ice packs or cold compresses on the neck, under armpits, and in the groin area
- Do not force liquids (a person may not be able to drink if delirious)

With summer power outages or brownouts a possibility in some parts of the U.S., it's helpful to know how to prepare and cope while you wait for the electricity (cooling) to come back on:

- Stay on the coolest floor and out of the sunshine
- Slow down and save physical activity until cooler times during the day
- Dress in lightweight, loose clothing

- Drink, drink, drink -- water and non-alcohol drinks! Don't wait until you feel thirsty; stay hydrated.
- Eat light meals and avoid alcohol and caffeine

To obtain a free educational pamphlet, *Summer Safety for Seniors: Tips for Staying Safe and Cool During the Warm Weather Months*, visit

www.bxtimes.com/News/2002/0815/School_News/048.html.

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