

Staying Healthy During a Heatwave: What You Need to Know

Summer is officially underway and when the weather gets hotter, it's important to take a few extra steps to look after yourself and those around you. While many people enjoy the sunshine, high temperatures can sometimes make people unwell, particularly older adults, young children, pregnant women, and people with long-term health conditions.

Here are some simple ways to stay safe during a heatwave and the signs of heat exhaustion and heatstroke to watch out for.

How to Stay Cool and Healthy

Drink plenty of fluids

One of the most important things you can do is stay hydrated.

- Drink water regularly, even if you don't feel thirsty.
- Avoid drinking large amounts of alcohol, as it can make dehydration worse.
- If you're exercising or spending time outdoors, drink extra fluids.

If you have been advised to limit how much you drink because of a medical condition, speak to your healthcare professional if you're unsure how to manage this during very hot weather.

Keep your home cool

Try to keep indoor spaces as cool as possible.

- Close curtains or blinds on windows that face the sun.
- Open windows when it's cooler outside, particularly overnight if it is safe to do so.
- Switch off lights and electrical equipment that you're not using, as these can generate heat.

Avoid the hottest part of the day

Temperatures are usually highest between 11am and 3pm.

If possible:

- Stay in the shade.
- Avoid strenuous physical activity during these hours.
- Plan walks, gardening or exercise for the early morning or later in the evening.

Dress for the weather

- Wear loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing.
- Choose breathable fabrics such as cotton or linen.
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses if you're outdoors.

Protect your skin

Sunburn increases your risk of skin cancer and can also make it harder for your body to cool itself.

Use sunscreen with a high SPF and UVA protection, and reapply it regularly according to the instructions.

Check on others

Some people are more vulnerable to the effects of hot weather.

Consider checking in on:

- Older neighbours or relatives.
- People with long-term medical conditions.
- Anyone living alone.
- Young children and babies.

Make sure they have enough water and are able to keep cool.

Heat Exhaustion: Know the Signs

Heat exhaustion happens when the body becomes too hot and loses too much water and salt.

Symptoms can include:

- Feeling tired or weak.
- Dizziness or fainting.
- Headache.
- Feeling sick or vomiting.
- Excessive sweating.
- Muscle cramps.
- Fast breathing or a rapid heartbeat.
- Intense thirst.

Heat exhaustion is not usually serious if it is recognised and treated quickly.

What should you do?

If you think someone has heat exhaustion:

- Move them to a cool place.
- Help them lie down and raise their feet slightly if possible.
- Encourage them to drink cool water or an oral rehydration drink.
- Cool their skin using a spray of water, cool wet cloths or a fan.

Most people should start to feel better within 30 minutes.

Heatstroke: A Medical Emergency

Heatstroke is much more serious and needs urgent medical attention.

Call **999 immediately** if someone:

- Is still unwell after 30 minutes of treating heat exhaustion.
- Has a very high body temperature.
- Stops sweating despite being very hot.
- Becomes confused, agitated or behaves unusually.
- Has a seizure (fit).
- Loses consciousness or is difficult to wake.

While waiting for an ambulance, continue trying to cool the person by moving them to a cool place, removing unnecessary clothing, and applying cool water or cold packs to the neck, armpits and groin.

People at Higher Risk

Extra care is needed for:

- Adults aged 65 and over.
- Babies and young children.
- People with heart disease, lung disease, kidney disease or diabetes.
- People taking certain medications that affect hydration or temperature regulation.
- Those who are unable to leave a hot environment or care for themselves.

If you or someone you care for falls into one of these groups, take extra precautions during periods of hot weather.

When to Seek Medical Advice

Contact your GP or seek medical advice if:

- You have symptoms of heat exhaustion that are not improving.
- You are worried about dehydration.
- You have a long-term health condition that is being affected by the heat.

If someone develops symptoms of heatstroke, call **999 immediately**.

A Final Reminder

Hot weather can affect anyone, but a few simple precautions can make a big difference. Drink plenty of fluids, stay out of the midday sun where possible, keep your home cool, and check on family members, friends and neighbours who may be more vulnerable.

By recognising the signs of heat exhaustion early and knowing when to seek urgent help, you can help keep yourself and others safe throughout the summer.

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