

SURVIVE THE HEAT

Know the effects of extreme heat, who is at risk and how you can prepare yourself and others.

During extreme heat it is easy to become dehydrated or for your body to overheat. If this happens, you may develop heat cramps, heat exhaustion or even heatstroke. Heatstroke is a medical emergency which can result in permanent damage to your vital organs, or even death, if not treated immediately. Extreme heat can also make existing medical conditions worse.

Could you or someone you know be at risk?

Extreme heat can affect anybody however the people most at risk:

- are aged over 65 years, especially those living alone
- have a medical condition such as diabetes, kidney disease or mental illness
- are taking medications that may affect the way the body reacts to heat such as:
 - allergy medicines (antihistamines)
 - blood pressure and heart medicines (beta-blockers)
 - seizure medicines (anticonvulsants)
 - water pills (diuretics)
 - antidepressants or antipsychotics
- have problematic alcohol or drug use
- have a disability
- have trouble moving around such as those who are bed bound or in wheelchairs
- pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers
- babies and young children
- are overweight or obese
- work or exercise outdoors
- have recently arrived from cooler climates.

Coping with the heat outdoors

- Stay out of the sun during the hottest part of the day.
- Avoid heavy activity like sport, renovating and gardening.
- If you are going walking or hiking, take plenty of water – dehydration is a major cause of calls for assistance to the SES.
- Wear a hat and light-coloured loose clothing made from natural fibres like cotton and linen.
- If possible, cancel or postpone outings in hot weather. If you must go out, stay in the shade.

Hot cars kill

- Never leave kids, adults or pets in hot cars. The temperature inside parked cars can double within minutes.

Coping with the heat at home

- Drink plenty of water, even if you don't feel thirsty (if your doctor limits your fluids, check how much to drink during hot weather).
- Keep yourself cool by using wet towels, putting your feet in cool water and taking cool (not cold) showers.
- Spend as much time as possible in a cool or air-conditioned space (your or your neighbour's or friend's home, or other air conditioned space.)
- Block out the sun at home during the day by closing curtains and blinds.
- Open the windows when there is a cool breeze.
- Eat smaller meals more often and cold meals such as salads.
- Make sure food that needs refrigeration is properly stored.
- Watch or listen to news reports to find out more information during extreme heat

How you can help others

- Keep in touch with sick or frail friends and family. Call them at least once on any extreme heat day.
- Encourage them to drink plenty of water.
- Offer to help family, friends and neighbours who are aged over 65 or have an illness by doing shopping or other errands so they can avoid the heat. Take them somewhere cool for the day or have them stay the night if they are unable to stay cool in their home.
- If you observe symptoms of heat-related illness, seek medical help.

Prepare for extreme heat

- Stock up on food, water and medicines so you don't have to go out in the heat. Visit your doctor to check if changes are needed to your medicines during extreme heat.
- Store medicines safely at the recommended temperature.
- Check that your fan or air-conditioner works well. Have your air-conditioner serviced if necessary.
- Look at the things you can do to make your home cooler such as installing window coverings, shade cloths or external blinds on the sides of the house facing the sun.

Prepare for power failure

- Ensure you have a torch, fully charged mobile phone, a battery operated radio and some spare batteries.
- Stock up on food items that do not require refrigeration or cooking, such as tinned fruit and vegetables, tinned meats or fish, bread and fruit.
- Have plenty of drinking water available.
- Stock up on medications and other essential items.
- Consider a battery-operated or hand held fan to assist with cooling.

Recognising heat-related illnesses

Heat can worsen the condition of someone who already has a medical issue such as heart disease or diabetes. Most reported illness and death is due to the effect of heat on those already ill. Heat can also cause illnesses such as heat cramps and heat exhaustion which can lead to the life-threatening condition, heatstroke. The following table will help you recognise the symptoms of each and what to do.

| SYMPTOMS | WHAT TO DO |
|---|---|
| HEAT CRAMPS Muscle pains Spasms in the abdomen, arms or legs | Stop activity and sit quietly in a cool place Drink cool water Rest a few hours before returning to activity See a doctor if cramps persist |
| HEAT EXHAUSTION Pale complexion and sweating Rapid heart rate Muscle cramps, weakness Dizziness, headache Nausea, vomiting Fainting | Go to a cool area and lie down Fan if possible Drink cool water if not vomiting Remove outer clothing Wet skin with cool water or wet cloths See a doctor |
| HEATSTROKE (a life-threatening emergency) Same symptoms as heat exhaustion except sweating stops Mental condition worsens, confusion Seizure Stroke-like symptoms or collapsing Unconsciousness | Call an ambulance – phone 000 Get the person to a cool area and lay them down Remove clothing Wet skin with water, fanning continuously Position an unconscious person on their side and clear their airway |

For more information visit the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

If you are unwell, call NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24 for 24-hour health advice or see your doctor.

In an emergency, call 000.

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