

# Heat Stress

Disabled, Older Adults and Caregivers



People suffer heat-related illness when temperatures rise and their bodies are unable to compensate and properly cool themselves. The body normally cools itself by sweating. But under some conditions, sweating just isn't enough. In such cases, a person's body temperature rises rapidly. Very high body temperatures may damage the brain or other vital organs.

Older adults and persons with disabilities are more prone to heat-related illness. Their bodies may not adjust as well as others to sudden changes in temperature or may have chronic medical conditions that interfere with normal body responses to heat.

The good news is that there are simple steps people can take to protect themselves, their friends and family from heat-related illness.

## REFERENCES

Extreme Heat: A Prevention Guide to Promote Your Personal Health and Safety:

[http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat\\_guide.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp)

Department of Health Services - Public Health Division – Public Health Preparedness:

<http://www.sonoma-county.org/heat>

OSHA - Emergency Preparedness Response:

<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/guides/heat.html>

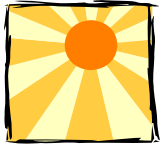
Environmental Protection Agency - "It's Too Darn Hot" - Planning for Excessive Heat Events:

[http://www.epa.gov/aging/resources/factsheets/itdhpfehe\\_english\\_2007\\_10.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/aging/resources/factsheets/itdhpfehe_english_2007_10.pdf)



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## HEAT STRESS



### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF

- Drink cool, nonalcoholic beverages. (If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask him how much you should drink when the weather is hot. Also, avoid extremely cold liquids because they can cause cramps.)
- Take a cool shower or bath.
- If possible, seek an air-conditioned environment. (If you don't have air conditioning, consider visiting an air-conditioned shopping mall or public library to cool off.)
- Wear light-weight clothing.
- If possible, remain indoors in the heat of the day.
- Do not engage in strenuous activities.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP PROTECT THE ELDERLY AND DISABLED

- Visit disabled or older adults at risk at least twice a day and watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Take them to air-conditioned locations if possible.
- Make sure persons with disabilities and older adults have access to an electric fan when possible (although in temperatures above 90 degrees, fans are not helpful and may actually be detrimental.)

## HEAT EXHAUSTION

**H**eat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after exposure to high temperatures and inadequate replacement of fluids. It is the body's response to an excessive loss of water and salt contained in sweat. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are elderly people with high blood pressure and people working or exercising in a hot environment.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HEAT EXHAUSTION

#### *Warning signs:*

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Skin - may be cool and moist
- Pulse rate - fast and weak
- Breathing - fast and shallow

#### *What to Do:*

- Drink cool, non-alcoholic beverages.
- Rest in cool, shaded or air-conditioned environment.
- Take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath.
- Wear light-weight clothing.

*If the person has heart problems, high blood pressure, or if symptoms last longer than 1 hour or worsen, seek medical attention immediately.*

## HEAT STROKE

**H**eat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature: the body's temperature rises rapidly, the body loses its ability to sweat, and is unable to cool down. Body temperatures rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HEAT STROKE

#### *Warning signs :*

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea

#### *What to do:*

- Get the person to a shady area.
- Cool the person rapidly, using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the person with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet.
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101°–102°F.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.