

HEAT SAFETY FOR OLDER ADULTS AND DIABETICS

Older adults and individuals with diabetes are more prone to heat-related illness because their bodies do not adjust as well to sudden changes in temperature. They are also more likely to have medical conditions that change their body's responses to heat, and to take prescription drugs that impair the body's ability to regulate its temperature or inhibit perspiration.

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness. It can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. Signs and symptoms include:

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

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. As body temperature rises rapidly, the body loses its ability to sweat or cool down. Signs and symptoms of heat stroke include:

- Extremely high body temperature (above 103 F)
- Red, hot, dry skin (no sweat)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following to stay safe in the heat:

- Slow down! Reduce or reschedule strenuous activities.
- Wear loose fitting, light-colored clothing.
- Drink plenty of water or cool, nonalcoholic, non-caffeinated beverages, even if you don't feel thirsty. Caffeine and alcohol are mild diuretics, so it's best to avoid them in hot weather.

- Spend as much time as you can in air-conditioned buildings. If you do not have air conditioning at home, visit a local senior center, library, mall, or designated “cooling center.” There will be announcements on local radio and TV stations if senior centers will be open for extended hours.
- Eat smaller meals more frequently. Don’t leave foods requiring refrigeration out in the heat.
- Take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath.
- When outdoors, find a shady area to rest. Wear sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat with a brim.
- Ask your doctor or other health professional if the medicines you take can increase your susceptibility to heat-related illness.
- Check on older friends, family, and neighbors, and ask them to check on you. Watch for signs of heat-related illness.
- Listen to local news or weather channels for health and safety updates. Besides the forecast temperature, pay attention to the heat index, which factors in the humidity level to get the “real feel” temperature. Sweating is not as effective at cooling you down when the humidity is very high.
- Call 911 if medical attention is needed.

Special Tips for Diabetics

Hot weather—temperatures of 80°F (about 27°C) or above, especially with high humidity—can affect medication, testing supplies and your health.

- Check medication package inserts to learn when high temperatures can affect them. Carry medications with you if you'll need to take them while you're away from home, and protect them from the heat.
- If you're traveling with insulin, don't store it in direct sunlight or in a hot car. Keep it in a cooler, but don't place it directly on ice or on a gel pack.
- Check glucose meter and test strip packages for information on use during high heat and humidity. Heat can damage insulin pumps and other equipment. Don't leave the disconnected pump or supplies in a hot car, by a pool, in the direct sun, or on the beach.
- It is essential that you drink plenty of fluids. Heat, stress, high blood sugar, and some diabetes medicines such as metformin can cause you to lose fluid, which increases the chances you'll become dehydrated.

Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).