

Patient information

A guide to looking after yourself and others during hot weather

Heatwave - what are the risks?

In a severe heat wave you may get dehydrated and your body may overheat, leading to heat exhaustion or heatstroke. Both need urgent treatment.

The symptoms of **heat exhaustion** include:

- headaches
- dizziness
- nausea and vomiting
- muscle weakness or cramps
- pale skin
- high temperature.

You should move somewhere cool and drink plenty of water or fruit juice. If you can, take a lukewarm shower or sponge yourself down with cold water.

Heatstroke can develop if heat exhaustion is left untreated, but it can also occur suddenly and without warning. Symptoms include:

- headaches
- nausea
- an intense thirst
- sleepiness
- hot, red and dry skin
- a sudden rise in temperature
- confusion

- aggression
- convulsions and loss of consciousness.

Heatstroke can result in irreversible damage to your body, including the brain, or death.

Who is at risk?

The heat can affect anyone, but some people run a greater risk of serious harm. These include:

- older people
- babies and young children
- people with mental health problems
- people on certain medication
- people with a serious chronic condition, particularly breathing or heart problems
- people who already have a high temperature from an infection
- people who use alcohol or illicit drugs
- people with mobility problems
- people who are physically active, like manual workers and sportsmen and women

What should you do?

Mostly it is a matter of common sense. Listen to your local weather forecast so you know if a heat wave is on the way. Plan ahead to reduce the risk of getting heat exhaustion or heatstroke.

Keep out of the heat

- If a heat wave is forecast, try and plan your day in a way that allows you to stay out of the heat.
- If you can, avoid going out in the hottest part of the day (11.00am-3.00pm).
- If you cannot avoid strenuous outdoor activity like sport, DIY or gardening, keep it for cooler parts of the day such as early morning.
- If you must go out, stay in the shade, wear a hat and light, loose-fitting clothes,

preferably cotton.

- If you will be outside for some time, take plenty of water with you.

Stay cool

- Stay inside, in the coolest rooms in your home, as much as possible.
- Close the curtains in rooms that get a lot of sun.
- Keep windows closed while the room is cooler than it is outside. Open them when the temperature inside rises, and at night for ventilation. If you are worried about security, at least open windows on the first floor and above.
- Take cool showers or baths and splash yourself several times a day with cold water, particularly your face and the back of your neck.

Drink regularly

- Drink regularly even if you do not feel thirsty – water or fruit juice are best.
- Try to avoid alcohol, tea and coffee. They make dehydration worse.
- Eat as you normally would.
- Try to eat more cold food, particularly salads and fruit, which contain water.
- Seek advice if you have any concerns
- Contact your doctor, a pharmacist or NHS 111 if you are worried about your health during a heat wave, especially if you are taking medication or have any unusual symptoms.
- Watch for cramp in your arms, legs or stomach, feelings of mild confusion, weakness or problems sleeping.
- If you have these symptoms, rest for several hours, keep cool and drink water or fruit juice. Seek medical advice if they get worse or don't go away.

Helping others

If anyone you know is likely to be at risk during a heat wave (see the list over page), help them get the advice and support they need. Older people living on their own should be visited daily to check they are OK.

While waiting for the ambulance

- If possible, move the person somewhere cooler.
- Increase ventilation by opening windows or using a fan.
- Cool them down as quickly as possible by loosening their clothes, sprinkling them with cold water or wrapping them in a damp sheet.
- If they are conscious, give them water or fruit juice to drink.
- Do not give aspirin or paracetamol.

Further information

Check the weather forecast and any high temperature health warnings at:
www.metoffice.gov.uk

For further information about how to protect your health during a heat wave visit **NHS Choices** at www.nhs.uk/summerhealth

Advice on ways to minimise ultraviolet ray induced skin and eye damage can be found in the Public Health England Sun Sense Guide found in the Health Protection Agency/Public Health England sunsense guide
http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/Radiation/UnderstandingRadiation/InformationSheets/info_SunsensePoster/

Heat waves may worsen air pollution. If you would like more information about air pollution in the UK or health advice for those who may be particularly sensitive to air pollution, there is an automated freephone recorded information service run by Defra on **0800 55 66 77**, or Defra website (<http://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/>).

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)
<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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