

Senior Summer Survival Tips

With summer just around the corner, **Senior Independence**, a division of the Ohio Presbyterian Retirement Services, provides these precautions for healthy summer fun. Don't let fun in the sun and, perhaps a more relaxed lifestyle, tempt you to neglect proper skin care. This information from the National Institute on Aging, one of the National Institutes of Health, and the Administration on Aging, part of the US Department of Health and Human Services, offers tips and precautions to deal with summer heat.

Use sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Skin care experts indicate that a SPF factor of more than 30 is a waste of money. Replace any sunscreen that has been around for more than two summers. Be sure to reapply sunscreen every two hours when you're enjoying outdoor activities.

No matter how much you try to protect your skin, the sun will still cause you to lose moisture. If sunburned, with skin redness and pain, take a shower, using soap, to remove oils that may block pores, preventing the body from cooling naturally. After bathing, use a moisturizer to counteract the sun's damage. Hydrate your skin from the inside by drinking several glasses of liquid, preferably water, each day.

Summer's high temperatures may cause heat-related illnesses. The body normally controls itself by sweating; however, under hot and humid conditions sweating may not be enough. High humidity does not allow the sweat to evaporate as quickly preventing the body from releasing heat, which cools the body down. Other conditions such as old age, obesity, fever, heart disease, sunburn or drug/alcohol use can limit the body's ability to regulate body temperature. Seniors' general health and/or lifestyle may increase their chances of suffering a heat-related illness.

Health factors which may increase risk for seniors include:

- Poor circulation, inefficient sweat glands, and changes in the skin caused by the normal aging process.
- Heart, lung and kidney diseases, as well as any illness that causes general weakness or fever.
- High blood pressure and other conditions that require changes in diet. People on salt-restricted diets may increase their risk; however, salt pills should not be used without first asking a doctor.
- The inability to perspire caused by medications including diuretics, sedatives and tranquilizers, and certain heart and blood pressure drugs.
- Taking several drugs for various conditions. It is important, however, to continue to take prescribed medication and to discuss possible problems with a physician.
- Being substantially overweight or underweight.

Lifestyle factors of older adults that may increase risk include:

- Unbearably hot living quarters. People who live in homes without fans or air conditioners should take the following steps to reduce heat discomfort: open windows at night; create cross-ventilation by opening windows on two sides of the building; cover windows when they are exposed to direct sunlight; and keep curtains, shades, or blinds drawn during the hottest part of the day.
- Lack of transportation. People without fans or air conditioners often are unable to go to shopping malls, movie theaters, and libraries to escape summer heat because of illness and/or the lack of transportation. Friends or relatives might be asked to supply transportation on particularly hot days. Many communities, area agencies, religious groups, and senior citizen centers provide such services.
- Overdressing. Because they may not feel the heat, older people may not dress appropriately in hot weather. Perhaps a friend or family member can help to select proper clothing. Natural fabrics such as cotton are best.
- Visiting overcrowded places. Trips should be scheduled during non-rush hour times and participation in special events should be carefully planned.
- Not understanding weather conditions. Older people, particularly those at special risk, should stay indoors on especially hot and humid days, particularly when an air pollution alert is in effect.

Hyperthermia, the generic name given to a variety of heat-related illnesses, occurs when the body's temperature control system is over loaded. Treatment depends on the severity of the illness:

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- *Heat Cramps*, painful spasms usually in leg and abdominal muscles, can be treated by applying firm pressure on cramping muscles or gently massaging the cramped area to relieve the spasm. Give sips of water unless nausea occurs.
- *Heat Exhaustion*, heavy sweating and weakness with clammy skin and a weak pulse should be treated by lying the victim down in a cool place, loosening clothing and applying cool, wet cloths. Give sips of water unless nausea occurs.
- *Heat Stroke (Sun Stroke)*, with symptoms of a body temperature above 104° and rapid pulse, is a severe medical emergency requiring a call to 9-1-1 or immediate transport to a hospital. Delay can be fatal. Use fans or air conditioners and cool sponges to lower the body temperature. **DO NOT GIVE FLUIDS.**

To help the body's cooling mechanism work:

1. Eat light, well-balanced meals and drink plenty of fluids. Replace salt and minerals.
2. Limit intake of alcoholic beverages, which further body dehydration.
3. Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing and apply sunscreens.
4. Pace yourself. Schedule activities carefully; reduce, eliminate or reschedule strenuous activities. Use a buddy system when working in hot and humid conditions.
5. Exercise early or late in the coolest times of the day: before 10 a.m. or after 6 p.m. Stay cool indoors when you can.
6. Use some **Common Sense!**
Throw in some protective eye gear like sunglasses or a visor, and you're all set for summer.