

Summer wise

**How to protect yourself
in hot weather**



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Patient Information Forum

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The sources used to create this publication are available on request.

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About this guide



While the summer may lift our spirits, temperatures can sometimes become uncomfortable and even dangerously hot. Anyone can be affected by the heat, but you may be more at risk if you have a long-term health condition or you're on certain medications.

Some of the tips in this guide may seem like common sense, but they can make a big difference to your wellbeing.

We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout.

In this guide you'll find references to our other free publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789** or visiting **independentage.org/publications**.

1 Looking after yourself



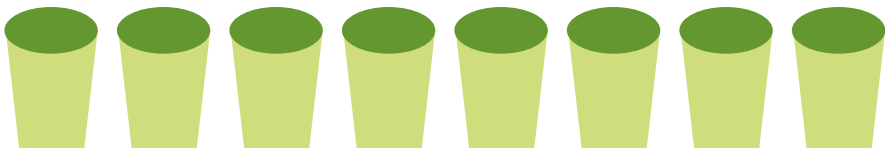
Changes in our bodies as we age mean:

- we're less likely to notice when we feel hot
- we take longer to cool down
- we're less likely to feel thirsty.

Drink enough fluids

Try to drink more than usual in hot weather, even if you're not thirsty. You need to drink about eight glasses (2 litres or 3½ pints) spread throughout the day – more if it's very hot.

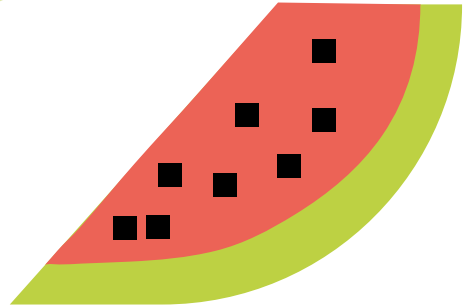
Have cool drinks like water and diluted fruit juice, and limit the number of drinks with caffeine in them (tea, coffee, cola, etc). Avoid excess alcohol and sugary drinks as these can dehydrate you. Find out more about the signs of dehydration in chapter 4.



“ I find it easier to take in larger quantities by using a straw for cold drinks. Small tumblers also seem to be less daunting. ”



Try to eat foods that contain a lot of water, such as salads, jellies, and fruits like watermelon.



Make sure you wash fruit, salad and vegetables thoroughly and keep food in the fridge. Warmer temperatures can increase the risk of food poisoning. Eat normally, even if the heat makes you feel less hungry. It may help to eat smaller, more frequent meals.

If you have to get up a lot in the night to go to the toilet, you may be tempted to drink less before going to bed. Avoid doing this when it's hot as you risk becoming dehydrated.

If you're fasting for Ramadan during a heatwave, make sure you drink before dawn and keep cool. People with some health conditions don't have to fast as it can risk their health. Speak to your imam about this. Consult your doctor if you choose to fast.

Slow down

Avoid too much activity, especially at the hottest times of the day (between 11am and 3pm). Save housework or gardening for early morning or late evening. If you go out, try to stay in the shade as much as possible. Take water, a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen with you.

“ Carry a small, battery-operated fan with you. These are inexpensive and you can get them from most stores and some petrol stations. ”

Keep cool

If it's cooler indoors, then stay inside. Help keep the heat out by closing the windows, curtains and blinds. However, metallic blinds and thick dark curtains can make the room hotter.

If you can, buy a good-quality electric fan. Make sure it's positioned in a safe place with no trailing wires. Fans can sometimes cause dehydration, so don't point them directly at you. Turn off non-essential lights and electrical equipment as these can generate heat.

If it's very hot at home, you could try going somewhere cool, such as your local library, cinema or place of worship.

Open your windows at night, if it's safe to do so, to cool your home down. Try to get the air flowing through.

“ Pets need special care too. Remember to give them plenty of fresh water and ensure that there is a relatively cool place for them to sit. ”

A hot home can make it difficult to sleep and can make some medical conditions worse. If you're worried, seek medical advice.



Dress for the weather

Wearing the right clothes can help you keep cool and protect you from the sun's radiation. At home wear as little as necessary. Light, loose-fitting, cotton clothes are best for staying cool in hot weather.

If you're going out in direct sunlight, cover your skin as much as possible. Wear long sleeves and trousers or long skirts in fabrics with a close weave, and wear a hat. Choose one that protects your face and neck.

Wear sandals that support your feet, with adjustable straps if your feet swell in the summer.



“ My dad often had to be persuaded to look out lighter clothing from his limited wardrobe and he felt it was a waste of money to buy new. So we used his birthday and Father's Day in June to buy lighter clothes. ”

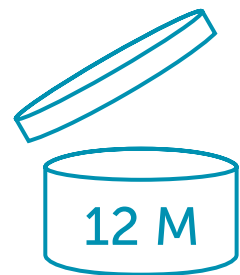
Protect your skin and eyes

Too much radiation from ultraviolet (UV) light causes skin damage. There are two main types of UV rays: UVA, which penetrates deep into the skin, and UVB, which causes sunburn.

Sunscreen can offer some protection. The sun protection factor (SPF) measures UVB protection and the star rating is for UVA protection. Look for sunscreen that has both. You need at least SPF 30 and four or five-star UVA protection, depending on your skin type.

Apply sunscreen generously half an hour before going out to give it time to dry and again just before you go into the sun. Get someone to help you if you can. Don't forget places like your ears, your head if you have thinning hair, and your feet. Sunscreen can rub off or you can sweat it off, so reapply it regularly and always after you've been in water.

Check the expiry date on your sunscreen and don't store it in the heat. The open jar symbol on the bottle tells you how long it can be safely used after opening.



UV rays can damage your eyes even on a cloudy day, so wear sunglasses. Choose a pair with a CE mark, British Standard mark 12312-1:2013 E or statement that they provide 100% UV protection (A and B). Choose larger sunglasses or a wraparound design that protects your eyes from the front and sides.



Sunlight and vitamin D

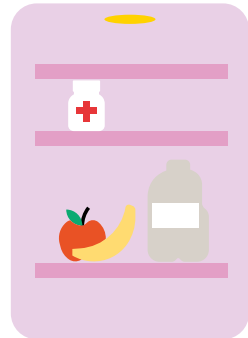
While it's important to protect your skin, exposure to sunlight helps our bodies make vitamin D, which we need for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. We get most of our vitamin D from sunlight exposure from around late March/early April to the end of September. The NHS website has more information ([nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-get-vitamin-d-from-sunlight](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-get-vitamin-d-from-sunlight)).



Sitting indoors by a sunny window doesn't help to make vitamin D because UVB rays can't get through glass. Speak to your GP or a pharmacist if you're concerned you don't get enough sun. For example, if you're unable to leave the house or you cover yourself completely for religious reasons. They may recommend other ways to get vitamin D, such as supplements.

Your medication

Some medications can make the effects of the heat worse. Talk to your GP or pharmacist about how best to manage this, especially if you're taking lots of different medications or you have a long-term health condition. Keep taking your medication unless you've been told not to.



Store your medication below 25°C or in the fridge. Check the storage instructions on the packaging. For more information see our guide **Living well with long-term health conditions**.

2 Planning ahead



Heatwaves can happen suddenly. It's a good idea to get organised before the weather gets hot.

The Meteorological Office (Met Office) has a warning system if a heatwave is likely. Listen out for heatwave warnings on television and on the radio, or check the Met Office website ([metoffice.gov.uk](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk)). You can also download the free Met Office weather app.

Air pollution can become worse during periods of hot weather. Keep updated and get advice from UK-AIR ([0800 55 66 77 \(recorded information\)](tel:0800556677), uk-air.defra.gov.uk).

Checklist to help you prepare



- Have you enough supplies of food, water and any medication you need?
- Can you get extra support if you need it – for example, to help with shopping if it's too hot to go out?
- Are your fridge and freezer working properly?
- Have you checked that any fans or air-conditioning are working?
- Can you open windows and vents so you can safely ventilate your home? Make sure there's no security risk. See our **Home security** guide for more details.
- Can you turn off your central heating?
- Could you get some plants? These can help cool the air.
- Have you got a thermometer you can keep in a commonly-used room, out of direct sunlight?



Getting help to keep your home cool

If your home gets uncomfortably hot in summer, find out if you can get a home hazard assessment. Ask your local council's environmental health department. You can find their contact details in the phone book or on [gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council).

You may also be able to get advice from a handyperson service or your local Home Improvement Agency ([0300 124 0315](tel:03001240315), findmyhia.org.uk).



3 If you're living in a care home

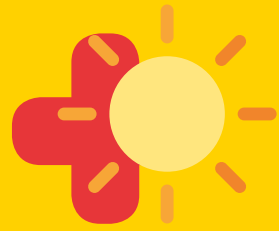


Your care home should have a plan for hot weather and heatwaves, including measures like:

- identify residents who are at higher risk of getting ill in the heat
- have enough fans and make sure there are cool areas at temperatures of 26°C or below
- install thermometers and check them regularly during the hottest periods
- turn off unnecessary lights and equipment
- create shady areas inside and cool the building at night by opening windows
- regularly give out cold drinks, water and ice
- provide wet towels and cool foot baths
- talk to GPs about possible changes to residents' medication and when to supply rehydration salts.

If you're worried that your care home isn't doing enough to protect you from the heat, speak to the care home manager or matron.

4 Heat-related illness



Older people can suffer health problems during hot weather. Keep an eye out for worrying symptoms.

Dehydration

Dehydration happens when you lose more fluid than you take in, by sweating for example.

Symptoms can include:

- dizziness
- thirst
- dry mouth, lips and eyes
- headaches
- tiredness
- dark-coloured urine (pee)
- urinating little, and fewer than four times a day.

You might be more likely to become dehydrated if you have diabetes, dementia, difficulties with swallowing or if you're on certain medications.

If you're caring for someone, keep a note of how much they drink, especially if they can't always drink without help.

You can become dehydrated before you feel thirsty. Make sure you drink plenty to reduce the risk.

If you've been sick or have diarrhoea, ask your pharmacist about oral rehydration sachets to help replace the salt and minerals you've lost. If your symptoms don't improve, see your GP.



Serious dehydration needs medical attention. If untreated, it can lead to urine infections, muscle damage, constipation and kidney stones. Dehydration is also the main cause of heat exhaustion.

Heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is where you become very hot and start to lose water or salt from your body. Symptoms can include:

- loss of appetite and feeling sick
- a headache
- dizziness and confusion
- sweating heavily and pale, clammy skin
- intense thirst
- cramps in your arms, legs and stomach
- fast breathing or pulse
- a temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) or above.

If you have these symptoms, go to a cool place, lie down with your feet slightly raised, drink plenty of water and remove any extra layers of clothes. You can also try to cool your skin, for example using wet flannels. You should start to cool down and feel better within 30 minutes. If you don't, call 999.

Heat exhaustion isn't usually serious and often improves on its own. But it can develop into heatstroke.



“ When playing cricket on a very hot day, I was keeping wicket and hadn't had enough water. I suddenly found that my vision was blurring and had to be helped from the field, laid down in a darkened room and had copious amounts of cold water poured into and on me to cool down. After about half an hour I was fine and went back to the game but it's not an experience you want to go through. Thirst is not a good indicator. Always drink more water than you think you need. ”

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is an emergency. Call 999 immediately if anyone shows these symptoms:

- severe headache
- a temperature of 40°C (104°F) or above
- feeling very sick and being sick
- rapid breathing or shortness of breath
- confusion
- very hot, flushed skin
- no sweating, despite being hot
- a fit or seizure
- loss of consciousness.

While waiting for the ambulance, move the person somewhere cool, give them water if they're conscious and shower their skin with cool water or cover them in damp towels. Put them in the recovery position if they lose consciousness.

Getting help

If you're worried about any health problems or you feel unwell, always contact your GP. You can also call NHS 111. They can advise on what to do next: whether to call 999 immediately, book an appointment with your GP or visit a pharmacist in your own time.

It's also a good idea to tell friends, family or a neighbour if you're feeling unwell. Try to stay in touch with people even if you can't go out much. And if you can, keep an eye on friends, relatives or neighbours who may be less able to look after themselves.

Our free advice guides

You may be interested in...



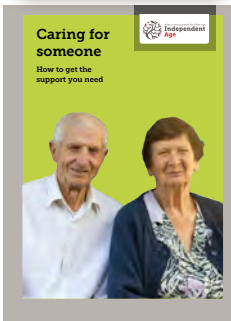
Living well with long-term health conditions

Living well and managing your condition.



Getting help at home

How to find help to stay independent in your own home.



Caring for someone

How to get the support you're entitled to.

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(0800 022 3444, ageuk.org.uk/cymru)
for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland
(0800 12 44 222, ageuk.org.uk/scotland)

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI
(0808 808 7575, ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland)

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About Independent Age

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A charity founded over 150 years ago, we're independent so you can be.

For more information, visit our website **independentage.org**

Call us for information or to arrange free, impartial advice from an adviser. Lines are open 8.30am – 6.30pm Monday to Friday. Freephone **0800 319 6789** or email **advice@independentage.org**



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