

# heatwave



LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AND  
OTHERS DURING HOT  
WEATHER – THE LATEST ADVICE



## Heat can be harmful to your health – key messages

- 1 In one hot spell in August 2003 in England, deaths in those aged 75 and over rose by 60%, with approximately 2000 total extra deaths than would normally be expected.
- 2 Those with heart, respiratory and serious health problems are more at risk and the heat can make these conditions worse. Babies and young children are also especially at risk.
- 3 Many prescription medicines can reduce your tolerance of heat. You should keep taking your medicines, but take extra care to keep cool.
- 4 Danger symptoms to watch out for in hot weather include: feeling faint and dizzy, short of breath, vomiting or increasing confusion.
- 5 Take immediate action if danger symptoms of heatstroke are present:
  - Cool down as quickly as possible (see the advice on page 3).
  - Do not take aspirin or paracetamol – this can make you worse. Please note: do carry on taking all other prescribed medicines.
  - Seek further advice from NHS Direct, a doctor, or ring 999 if the person has collapsed.

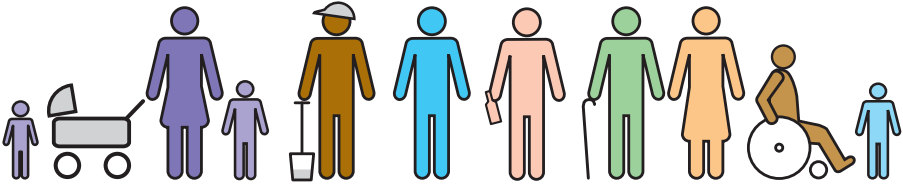
## Top tips for keeping cool

It is best for your health to avoid getting too hot in the first place. Remember to think of those who are more at risk from the effects of heat. Below are some tips to keep yourself and others cool:

- Keep windows closed when the room is cooler than it is outside. Open windows at night when the temperature outside has dropped.
- Reduce heat from sunlight coming through the windows. External shading, like shutters, is best. Metal blinds and dark curtains may absorb heat and make the room warmer – it is best to use pale curtains or reflective materials.
- Have plenty of cold drinks, avoid excess alcohol, caffeine and hot drinks.
- Have cool showers or baths, put a loose, cotton, damp cloth or scarf on the back of the neck, spray or splash your face with cold water frequently to help keep your body cool.

If you, or somebody you know, find your home to be uncomfortably hot and you have concerns about it affecting yours or someone else's health, seek medical advice about the person and from the environmental health department within your local authority about the home.

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## Who is at risk?

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

- Older people, especially older women and those over 75.
- Babies and young children.
- People with serious 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 misuse alcohol or take illicit drugs.
- People with mobility problems.
- People who are physically active, like manual workers and sportsmen and women.

## What should you do?

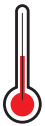
Mostly, it's a matter of common sense. Listen to your local weather forecast so you know if a heatwave is on the way. Plan ahead to reduce the risk of ill health from the heat.

## Keep out of the heat



- If a heatwave 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 (11am – 3pm).
- If you can't avoid strenuous outdoor activity, like sport, DIY or gardening, keep it for cooler parts of the day, like early morning or evening.
- 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



- A loose, cotton, damp cloth or scarf on the back of the neck, or spraying or splashing your face and the back of your neck with cold water several times a day can help keep you cool.
- Stay inside, in the coolest rooms in your home, as much as possible.
- Reduce heat from sunlight coming through the windows. External shading, e.g. shutters, is best. Metal blinds and dark curtains may absorb heat and make the room warmer – it is best to use pale curtains or reflective material.
- Keep windows closed while the room is cooler than it is outside. Open them when the temperature inside rises, and at night for ventilation.

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If you are worried about security, at least open windows on the first floor and above.

- Indoor and outdoor plants will help keep your home cool due to evaporation and the shading from trees and bushes.
- Take cool showers or baths.

### Drink regularly



- Drink regularly even if you do not feel thirsty – water or fruit juice are best.
- Have plenty of cold drinks, avoid excess alcohol, caffeine and hot drinks
- Eat light meals with a higher proportion of vegetables. 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 Direct if you are worried about your health during a heatwave, especially if you are taking medication, if you feel unwell 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.

Remember, heatstroke can kill. It can develop very suddenly, and rapidly lead to unconsciousness. If you suspect someone has heatstroke, call 999 immediately.

## Helping others



- If anyone you know is likely to be at risk during a heatwave (see the list on page 4), 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 them aspirin or paracetamol.

If you want more information about hot weather and your health please visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). If you are concerned about your health or somebody you care for, please contact NHS Direct on 0845 46 47, [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) or your local pharmacist or GP.

## Further information



- Check the weather forecast and any high temperature health warnings at [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)
- For further information about how to protect your health during a heatwave visit NHS Choices at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)
- Contact NHS Direct on **0845 46 47** or NHS Choices at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) for advice about heat exhaustion and heatstroke.
- You can get advice on protecting your skin during hot weather from the Cancer Research UK SunSmart campaign website at [www.sunsmart.org.uk](http://www.sunsmart.org.uk)



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