

emergency **REDiPlan**



Coping with hot weather – Advice for seniors

Extreme heat can affect our daily activities, as well as being a serious risk to health and wellbeing.

What can happen in a heatwave?

Think about what you would do if extreme heat:

- affected your health or the health of someone you know
- caused loss of electricity
- disrupted public transport
- closed schools or workplaces.

Everyone can be affected by heat in different ways, but there are some people in the community more susceptible to prolonged extreme heat. For older adults, extreme heat can be a serious issue because of their health and mobility status.

There are a number of simple things you can do to prevent the hot weather becoming a serious problem for you or family members, friends or neighbours.

Tips for coping with the heat

Keep out of the heat

- Plan your day in a way that allows you to stay out of the heat during the hottest part of the day.
- Ahead of hotter weather, buy a few extra items to make sure you have enough food at home to last over the hot period. Think about paying bills on the internet or over the phone.
- If you cannot avoid strenuous activity like sport, DIY or gardening, keep it for the cooler parts of the day such as early morning.

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- If you must go out, stay in the shade. Wear a hat, light-coloured, loose-fitting clothes, preferably made of natural fibres. Wear sunglasses and apply 30 SPF sunscreen and take plenty of water with you.
- Ensure your pets or companion animals have water and plenty of shade when they are outside.

Stay cool

- Look at the things you can do to make your home cooler. Install or upgrade insulation in your roof, install awnings, shade cloth or external blinds on the sides of the house facing the sun. For further advice talk to a registered building practitioner or visit www.yourhome.gov.au.
- If you can, stay inside, in the coolest rooms in the house.
- Reduce heat from sunlight coming through the windows using external shades or light-coloured curtains. If needed, ask for help from a neighbour or family to draw the blinds.
- Use an air conditioner, evaporative cooler or fan to keep cool. Having a bowl of ice or cold water in front of the fan can also assist in cooling the air.
- Have your air conditioner serviced before summer.
- Remember, sometimes the electricity fails during heatwaves, so you'll need an alternative way to cool your home.
- Ensure there is sufficient air circulation, either from an air conditioner or by leaving a secured window or door open.
- Take cool showers and splash yourself several times a day with cold water, particularly your face and the back of your neck. A loose, cotton, damp cloth or scarf on the back of the neck can also help you to stay cool.
- Go to an air-conditioned building in your local area to cool off – a shopping mall, community centre, library or swimming pool.
- Recognise the signs and symptoms of heat stress.

Drink regularly

- Drink regularly, even if you do not feel thirsty. Water is the best option.
- Avoid alcohol, tea and coffee and sugary or fizzy drinks. They make dehydration worse.
- Eat little and often rather than large meals. Try to eat more cold food, particularly salads and fruit, which contain water.

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Get help

People who know each other in their community are more likely to turn to each other for help, and cope better in the long term with crises and emergencies. The best part is that taking the time to get to know your neighbours has a range of other benefits, too.

- Talk to your carers, family or neighbours about what help they can provide you during the hotter weather. It could be simple things like helping draw the blinds, to doing that extra bit of shopping. They can also check on you to see how you are coping. Often people don't like to bother neighbours, family or friends, because they are 'busy' but, remember, extreme heat is a serious situation.
- Talk to your family doctor about how extreme heat might affect any particular health conditions you might have.

For more information

Visit www.redcross.org.au/rediplan for more information on preparing yourself and your household for emergencies. Email rediplan@redcross.org.au or call the Red Cross office in your state for an 'Emergency REDiPlan Household Preparedness for Seniors' booklet.

For health-related information, talk to your local doctor, or check (or have a friend or family member check) the health department website in your state or territory.

Important information:

Use this space to write important phone numbers or reminders.

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Watching for heat stress Source: Australian Red Cross First Aid Handbook (2006)

There are two types of heat stress or hyperthermia – heat exhaustion and, the more serious, heat stroke.

	Signs and symptoms	What to do
<p>Heat exhaustion happens when someone becomes dehydrated due to loss of water from exercising or working in poorly-ventilated conditions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscle cramps, especially in the calves and toes • Exhaustion and general weakness • Nausea and/or vomiting • Dizzy spells • Pale, cool, clammy skin at first, becoming flushed and red later • A rapid and weak pulse and rapid noisy breathing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the person to lie down at total rest in a cool area • Loosen any tight clothing • If fully alert and conscious, give them frequent small drinks of water or ice chips to suck • If muscle cramps occur, gently stretch the affected muscles to ease pain • Check vital signs at regular intervals • If unconscious or not fully conscious, place in the recovery position • If the person is unable to drink, vomiting or unconscious, call 000 for an ambulance (or 112 from a mobile) • Prepare to give CPR, if necessary
<p>Heat stroke is more serious and means the body can not cool down by sweating. The body temperature rises and organ damage can occur.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No longer sweating • Red, hot and dry skin • A body temperature over 40°C • A rapid and strong pulse • Rapid and noisy breathing • Irrational or aggressive behaviour • Losing consciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call 000 for an ambulance (or 112 from a mobile) • Cool the person using wet towels or a wet sheet with a fan directed across the surface • If ice packs are available, wrap them in towels and place them in the armpits or groin • If shivering occurs, stop active cooling • Check vital signs at regular intervals • If unconscious or not fully conscious, place in the recovery position • Prepare to give CPR, if necessary

A Red Cross first-aid course will help you cope with these situations and other health emergencies until help arrives. For more information, visit www.redcross.org.au/firstaid, email firstaid@redcross.org.au or call 1300 367 428.