

## CARE IN EXTREME HOT WEATHER

### *Keeping Cool*

As we age our bodies lose the ability to deal with heat, regardless of how health-conscious or fit we may be. Dr Neil Resnick, Chief of geriatric medicine at University of Pittsburgh Medical Centre explains: 'From the time we're born until age 25 to 30, all our organ systems are growing and developing. Then at age 30 every body part starts to decline at a rate of about 1% per year. The good news is that our organs develop at a capacity of 4 to 6 times more than we need, so even if we lose half the capacity of each organ, we still have 2 to 3 times more than we need' ...

#### **UNLESS IT IS REALLY HOT...**

In extreme heat, blood is redirected to the skin to help us cool down. To make up for that, the body needs to make more blood so that the heart, brain and other organs will get enough. That is why we need to remain hydrated. Ageing kidneys are not as good at keeping fluids in our system, and the person may not be able to cool down as readily. Also, the sense of thirst diminishes with age, so older people may not realise that they need more water.

People need to be aware that medications such as anti-depressants and some circulatory medications can place a person at higher risk of experiencing heat stress and heat-related injuries. The use of some medications can impair the ability to sweat and affect the heart's capacity to pump harder, resulting in heart or kidney failure if those organs do not receive enough blood.

(sourced from: [www.eons.com/groups/topic/2561956-Let-s-stay-cool-out-there-](http://www.eons.com/groups/topic/2561956-Let-s-stay-cool-out-there-) )

NSW Health Epidemiologist, Claire Monger says "People need to be alert for the symptoms associated with heat exhaustion in themselves or others, especially young children and the elderly."

Symptoms of heat exhaustion include nausea, faintness, dizziness, loss of appetite, weakness, headache, and vomiting. "If any of these symptoms occur, lay the person down and apply cool, wet towels around the neck and under the arms, and have them drink cool fluids."

**"If the person does not respond to treatment or has severe symptoms such as confusion or collapse, call 000 immediately and ask for the Ambulance Service."** advises Ms Monger.

(sourced from: [www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2004/20041013\\_02.html](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/news/2004/20041013_02.html) )

Heat stroke occurs when a person can no longer perspire and his or her temperature control mechanism stops working. At first, it will seem like heat exhaustion, but the person may begin to experience confusion, seizures and other more serious side effects. "Heat-related injuries range from minor issues such as muscle cramps due to loss of water and salt through perspiration; to heat exhaustion; and finally heat stroke, which can be fatal," says Dr. Elizabeth Paras. (Physician, New York-Presbyterian Hospital)

(sourced from: [www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/148545.php](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/148545.php) )

President of the Australian Medical Association Queensland – Dr Richard Kidd, says everyone, especially those who are in high risk groups, should avoid excess physical activity.

Many older people and those with mobility problems tend to restrict their fluids in order to reduce trips to the bathroom, but Dr Kidd warns that's the wrong thing to do in hot weather.

"For those who are overweight, the main problem is insulation. The extra fat just under the skin gives extra insulation. That means that their body temperature inside is going up and up and up, even if they feel fairly

cool on the outside.” His advice to everyone is to drink lots of fluid, stay indoors in air-conditioning or with the windows open and keep to the lower story of your home as heat rises.

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/01/09/3404299.htm> (article by Ursula Skjonnemand)

### Recommendations:

- ✦ Slow down. When temperatures begin to reach extreme highs you should stay in the coolest place available out of the sun, and reduce or eliminate all strenuous activities. Some seniors choose to find relief in an air-conditioned environment like the local shopping complex, cinema or club.
- ✦ Dress cool. Lightweight, light-colored, loose clothing reflects heat and sunlight, and helps your body maintain normal temperatures. Wear a minimum of clothing - forget stockings and restrictive underwear. Natural fibres are better in hot weather.
- ✦ Don't get too much sun. Sunburn makes the job of heat dissipation that much more difficult. Always remember to use sunblock (SPF 15 or greater) when outdoors for prolonged periods of time in the summer months, even on hazy or cloudy days. Wear a broad rimmed hat and avoid being outside between 11 am and 3pm.
- ✦ Anticipate change. Turn on air conditioning systems as soon as you go inside, and take off extra layers of clothing when going outside. For seniors having trouble recognising temperature changes, these automatic actions help maintain a comfortable indoor and outdoor environment.  
[www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/148545.php](http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/148545.php)    [www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au)

### Some more TIPS on keeping cool:

- ✦ In some circumstances seniors may find the cost of purchase and / or operating air-conditioners may be restrictive. However, air-conditioners are the best protection against heat-related illness and death. Even a few hours a day in air-conditioning can greatly reduce the risk.
- ✦ Draw curtains and blinds if windows are in direct sun. Reflective lining for curtains and blinds and / or installation of outside awnings can help to reduce heat inside your home.
- ✦ Placing a bowl of ice cubes in front of an electric fan can impart a cool air flow, but when temperatures soar above 35° centigrade, fans alone will not prevent heat related illness. **(Department of Health and Ageing** advises that the use of fans alone, in an overheated environment can make dehydration worse, ensure small amounts of fluids are readily available, rather than large amounts of fluids less frequently. [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au) )
- ✦ Wring out a cloth in cool water and use that to wipe your arms and neck.
- ✦ Have tepid baths and showers (not too hot or too cold).

### What about your pets?

CEO of the RSPCA, Mark Townsend, advises for those hot days “ Make sure they (*your pets*) have got good shade, plenty of water, and if you are going out ... leave **two** bowls of water. Also, that dogs should **not** be taken anywhere in cars on hot days.”

(sourced from: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/01/09/3404299.htm> )

Dr David Sprott from Caboolture District Animal Hospital says "In summer, heatstroke is a problem for older dogs". Protect him from the elements. Make sure your dog has plenty of shade and ample supplies of fresh, cool water. Try using an atomizer to help your pet beat the heat. You may also want to clip your pet's coat to help him keep cool. Never leave animals in the car unattended as they can heat up to fatal temperatures, even with windows slightly open. [www.dogslife.com.au](http://www.dogslife.com.au) (article by Carrol Baker)