

## Elderly in Jeopardy During Heat Wave

Summer heat waves pose a very real danger to the elderly. Normally, our body controls and regulates elevated temperature by allowing heat loss through the skin and by evaporation.

As we age, our ability to control the body's temperature is diminished. Aging causes a decrease in the body's ability to adjust to heat and to sense temperature extremes.

The elderly are more susceptible to heat related disorders and react to sudden changes in temperatures by losing the ability to cool down.

Those with the following chronic health conditions are at greater risk: Heart Disease, Kidney Disease, Lung Disease, Obesity, and Diabetes.

Certain medications interfere with the body's ability to control temperature. Medications can inhibit the ability to perspire or may increase electrolyte loss.

Heat Wave: Temperatures greater than 90 degrees for more than 48 hours and humidity of 80% or greater.

Heat Cramps: Muscle pain and cramps caused by loss of water and salt from over exertion. This condition usually affects arms, legs and abdominal muscles.

Treatment: stop activity, give fluids, massage the affected muscle.

Heat Exhaustion: A form of heat related illness that develops after several days of elevated temperatures and inadequate fluid intake. Heat exhaustion also develops when people over exert during heat and lose the fluids through profuse perspiring.

Signs: Flushed or red skin, skin cool and pale, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, and exhaustion.

Treatment: Replenish fluids, may need to seek medical care.

Heat Stroke or Sun Stroke: Life threatening heat related illness. Body temperature rises. Body unable to sweat and cool itself.

Signs: Skin is red, hot and dry, dizziness, nausea, throbbing headache, and a rapid pulse.

Treatment: Call 911 and move person to a cool area. Body must be cooled rapidly. Use ice packs, cool water, wet towels or sheets, shower or hose. Do not use alcohol. Monitor for breathing difficulty.

Prevention of Heat Related Conditions:

Increase fluid intake after you check with your doctor. If going outdoors, take water with you at all times. Stay indoors during heat of the day. Close curtains or blinds during the mid-day heat if you have air conditioning.

Limit outdoor activity to early AM or PM. If you have no air conditioning open windows for cross ventilation. Use fans, take frequent cool showers, go to mall, theater, restaurant, or library during heat of the day. Contact emergency management to locate heat relief shelters.

Clothing: light weight, light colors, loose fitting. Wear a hat.

Exercise: if you must exercise be sure to drink 2 to 4 glasses of water hourly and take frequent rest periods. Avoid alcohol, caffeine and reduce sugarfree drinks. Meals should be light and frequent. Do not use salt tablets without consulting doctor.

Special considerations when working with the frail elderly: Many elderly will not turn on air conditioning as they are often cool and do not always realize that the heat is extreme.

Many elderly rarely drink the normal 8 glasses daily. It is often difficult to get them to increase fluid intake without lots of encouragement.

If your elder is living on a limited income they are not likely to use the air conditioner.

Many elderly without air conditioning may be very reluctant to open windows due to safety concerns.

The frail elderly are at extreme risk during heat waves and need daily monitoring. Be sure someone is visiting them 2-3 times a day. Do not rely on just talking on the phone as you need to be able to monitor their fluid intake and recognize changes in their condition.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

#### About the Author

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