

Partners in Quality Care



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Objectives:

Review heat related illnesses

Health factors related to heat illnesses

Review of Dehydration

References:

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/22111-hyperthermia>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/heat-related-health-dangers-older-adults-soar-during-summer>

<https://www.emergencyphysicians.org/article/know-when-to-go/heat-related-illnesses>

<https://www.weather.gov/safely/heat-during>

<https://www.npr.org/2026/06/28/nx-s1-5874019/weather-extreme-heat-wave-north-carolina-ohio-july-4-danger-prepare>

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/004019.htm> - Aging changes in Vital Signs

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000982.htm> - Dehydration

HEAT RELATED ILLNESSES

Too much heat is not safe for anyone. It is even riskier for a person who is older or has health problems. It is important for people to be cautious and get relief quickly when they are overheated. Otherwise, they might start to feel sick or risk a heat-related illness that could cause serious health issues. Hotter days can cause difficulty in the body's ability to regulate its temperature. This can be challenging for older adults who typically do not adjust as well as others to sudden temperature changes. Additionally, older adults are more likely to have chronic medical conditions that affect the body's response to temperature, and to take prescription medicines that alter the body's ability to control temperature or sweat. Being overheated for too long or being exposed without protection to the sun can cause many health problems. Heat-related illnesses include the following:

- **Heat syncope** is a sudden dizziness that can happen when you are active in hot weather. If you take a heart medication called a beta blocker or are not acclimated to hot weather, you are even more likely to feel faint. Rest in a cool place, put your legs up, and drink water to make the dizzy feeling go away.
- **Heat cramps** are the painful tightening or spasms of muscles in your stomach, arms, or legs. Cramps can result from hard work or intense exercise. Though your body temperature and pulse usually stay normal during heat cramps, your skin may feel moist and cool. Stop the physical activity you're doing and rest in the shade or in a cool building. Drink plenty of fluids, such as water and sports drinks containing electrolytes. Do not consume alcohol or caffeinated beverages.
- **Heat edema** is a swelling in your ankles and feet when you get hot. Put your legs up to help reduce swelling. If that doesn't work fairly quickly, check with your health care provider.
- **Heat rash** is a skin irritation from heavy sweating. It causes red clusters of small blisters that look similar to pimples on the skin. Your skin may feel itchy or you may feel "prickly" tingling pain. Keep the infected area dry, use powder to sooth the rash, and stay in cool areas.
- **Heat exhaustion** is a warning that your body can no longer keep itself cool. You might feel thirsty, dizzy, weak, uncoordinated, and nauseated. You may sweat a lot. Your body temperature may stay normal, but your skin may feel cold and clammy. Some people with heat exhaustion have a rapid pulse. Rest in a cool place and get plenty of fluids. If you don't feel better soon, get medical care. Be cautious because heat exhaustion can progress to heat stroke.
- **Heat stroke** is a medical emergency in which the body's temperature rises above 104°F. Signs of heat stroke are fainting; confusion or acting strangely; not sweating even when it's hot; dry, flushed skin; strong, rapid pulse; or a slow, weak pulse. When a person has any of these symptoms, they should seek medical help right away and immediately move to a cooler place, such as under shade or indoors. They should also take action to lower their body temperature with cool clothes, a cool bath or shower, and fans.

HEAT RELATED ILLNESSES

Health related factors that may increase the risk of heat related illnesses include:

- Age-related changes to the skin such as poor blood circulation and inefficient sweat glands.
- Aging decreases a person's ability to sweat, and they may have difficulty telling when they are becoming overheated.
- Heart, lung, and kidney diseases, as well as any illness that causes general weakness or fever.
- High blood pressure or other conditions that require changes in diet, such as salt-restricted diets.
- Reduced sweating, caused by medications such as diuretics, sedatives, tranquilizers, and certain heart and blood pressure drugs.
- Taking several drugs for various conditions (It is important, however, to continue to take prescribed medication and discuss possible problems with a physician.)
- Being substantially overweight or underweight.
- Drinking alcoholic beverages.
- Being dehydrated.

Lifestyle factors can also increase risk, including extremely hot living quarters, lack of transportation, overdressing, visiting overcrowded places, and not understanding how to respond to weather conditions. Older people, particularly those at special risk, should stay indoors on particularly hot and humid days, especially when there is an air pollution alert in effect. To stay cool, drink plenty of fluids and wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothes in natural fabrics. People without fans or air conditioners should keep their homes as cool as possible or go someplace cool. Senior centers, religious groups, and social service organizations in many communities provide cooling centers when the temperatures rise. Or visit public air-conditioned places such as shopping malls, movie theaters, or libraries.

Heat intolerance is a feeling of being overheated when the temperature around a person rises. It can often cause heavy sweating. Heat intolerance usually comes on slowly and lasts for a long time, but it may also occur quickly and be due to a serious illness. Heat intolerance may be caused by different factors. Some types of medicines may make a person less tolerant to heat. Not all medicines will affect everyone the same. If someone has questions about any medicines they take, they should contact their health care provider. Certain health conditions may make a person less tolerant to heat. This can be due to the condition itself or medicine they may take to manage it, these include Cystic fibrosis, Diabetes, cardiovascular disease, Graves disease, mental health conditions, Multiple Sclerosis, obesity, too much thyroid hormone.

A 'heat dome' is driving dangerous heat across the U.S. into the July 4 weekend

June 28, 2026, 7:37 PM ET - Read the entire article at the link below:

<https://www.npr.org/2026/06/28/nx-s1-5874019/weather-extreme-heat-wave-north-carolina-ohio-july-4-danger-prepare>

“Extreme heat this week will blanket a majority of American states through the July 4 weekend, according to forecasters. The National Weather Service on Sunday said "dangerous to record setting heat will expand across the eastern two-thirds" of the country. In areas including Ohio, parts of North Carolina and Washington, D.C., the extreme temperatures and humidity will be especially threatening for people with respiratory issues and the elderly.”

HEAT RELATED ILLNESSES

Heat stroke is a severe form of hyperthermia (core body temperature higher than normal) that occurs when the body is overwhelmed by heat and unable to control its temperature. Someone with a body temperature above 104 degrees Fahrenheit is likely suffering from heat stroke. Symptoms include fainting; a change in behavior (confusion, combativeness, staggering, possible delirium or coma); dry, flushed skin and a strong, rapid pulse; and lack of sweating. Seek immediate medical attention for a person with any of these symptoms, especially an older adult. If you suspect that someone is suffering from a heat-related illness:

- Call 911 if you suspect heat stroke.
- Get the person out of the heat and into a shady, air-conditioned or other cool place. Urge them to lie down.
- If the person can swallow safely, offer fluids such as water and fruit or vegetable juices, but not alcohol or caffeine.
- Apply a cold, wet cloth to the wrists, neck, armpits, and groin. These are places where blood passes close to the surface of the skin, and a cold cloth can help cool the blood.
- Encourage the person to shower, bathe, or sponge off with cool water if it is safe to do so.
- Document and report according to the client's plan of care heat related concerns observed with your clients, as well as your observations such as client's not drinking fluids, client reporting an inability to get cool, lack of resources for cooling their home, and other client concerns. Pay close attention to clients who are unable to verbalize that they are too hot or that they are thirsty (such as a client with dementia, young children, non-verbal clients) and observe and report if it appears the client is overheating and talk with your supervisor regarding your role in those situations. If the client does not have any way to cool their living environment, notify your agency, they may be able to locate resources to assist clients with fans and cooling agents.

Dehydration occurs when a person's body does not have as much water and fluids as it needs. Dehydration can be mild, moderate, or severe, based on how much of a person's body's fluid is lost or not replaced. Severe dehydration is a life-threatening emergency. A person can become dehydrated if they lose too much fluid, do not drink enough water or fluids, or both. A person's body may lose a lot of fluid from:

- Sweating too much, for example, from exercising in hot weather
- Fever
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Urinating too much (uncontrolled diabetes or some medicines, like diuretics, can cause a person to urinate a lot)

A person might not drink enough fluids because:

- They do not feel like eating or drinking because they are sick
- Being nauseated
- Having a sore throat or mouth sores

Older adults and people with certain diseases, such as diabetes, are also at higher risk for dehydration.

Some people lose their sense of thirst as they age so they do not drink enough fluids. If someone is nonverbal, they may not be able to tell you when they are thirsty. A person may also take medications that cause them to urinate or sweat more. Offer your clients liquids frequently and report according to the plan of care if your clients are not drinking water or other fluids.