



Mind: Heat Wave -- Cool Down and Stay Safe

Body: How to Treat a Sunburn

Spirit: Finding Hope

Heat Wave -- Cool Down and Stay Safe



Summertime brings about a much-anticipated reprieve from the cold, snowy, or rainy seasons. We often rush to enjoy the radiant sunshine and replenish our much-needed vitamin D. However, it's crucial to be mindful of the potential pitfalls of this joyous time, especially as our planet faces the challenges of record-breaking high temperatures. What can we do to ensure we don't overdo our sun exposure?

The standard advice - take it slow, wear a hat, put on breathable clothing, avoid the sun during peak hours, intersperse your sun exposure with periods in the shade, and apply a good sunscreen - remains valid. House fans can help to cool us down, and if you don't have air conditioning in your home, take advantage of spending time in air-conditioned public places such as malls, community centres and libraries. While it is important to know how to mitigate the risks of excessive exposure, it is equally important to be aware of the warning signs of heat-related distress and how to respond.

The Sun and Older Adults

Maintaining our body temperature takes energy. This task can pose a significant stress for older adults, potentially leading to serious or even fatal consequences. As we age, our ability to handle temperature changes deteriorates.

One reason is the thinning subcutaneous fat layer beneath our skin, crucial for managing our heat and cold responses. Moreover, our progressively reduced capacity to sweat, which affects heat regulation, and potential side effects from chronic medication use can hinder our ability to cope in high heat conditions during later years. Dr. Tim Takaro, a professor of health sciences at Simon Fraser University, points out that the hypothalamus's role in regulating physiological responses to heat may also decline with age. Consequently, prolonged exposure to the sun can lead to dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke in older adults.

Dehydration

Dehydration arises when we expel more fluids than we intake, leading to symptoms like thirst, reduced urine output, increased heart rate, lower blood pressure, dry eyes, vomiting, muscle cramps, and light-headedness. If left untreated, it can progress to heat exhaustion or heat stroke, with fatal potential. Rehydrate frequently with small servings of fluids, including water, clear broths, popsicles, and electrolyte replacements such as Powerade and Gatorade.

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Jennifer Legge, Newsletter Editor for Age-Friendly Business®, Jennifer@AgeFriendlyBusiness.com



Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion can bring symptoms similar to dehydration, with additions like heavy sweating or inability to sweat, confusion, fever up to 103 F, fainting, seizures, difficulty breathing, and chest or abdominal pains. If these symptoms persist despite resting, cooling down, and rehydrating, seek immediate medical help.

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is often indicated by cognitive issues such as confusion, lethargy, seizures, and coma, coupled with a body temperature above 103 F. Delayed treatment may result in organ damage and fatality in over 50% of cases. Remembering the tragic loss of more than 10,000 lives during the extended heat wave in France in 2003 underscores the gravity of this issue.

UV Exposure

Remember: UV exposure is linked to an estimated 20% of cataract cases and can also trigger Age-Related Macular Degeneration, a leading cause of blindness in North America.

Adopting a Supportive Stance

It's essential to check in on those who might struggle with heat relief and ensure they have sufficient fluids, access to cooling aids, regular contact, and reprieve from the heat throughout the day. As Charles de Lint once said, "I don't want to live in the kind of world where we don't look out for each other. Not just the people that are close to us, but anybody who needs a helping hand."

With preparation and care, we can make the summer living easy and safe for everyone.

Rhonda Latreille, MBA, CPCA
Founder & CEO
Age-Friendly Business[®]

How to Treat a Sunburn

Sunburn can be effectively treated at home by first cooling the skin with a damp cloth or a cool (not cold) bath. Over-the-counter remedies such as aloe vera, hydrocortisone creams, or moisturizers can help soothe the skin and reduce inflammation. Stay hydrated to help the skin recover and avoid further sun exposure until the sunburn heals completely. If the sunburn is severe or accompanied by symptoms like high fever, chills, or blistering, seek medical attention.

Finding Hope



"The best way to not feel hopeless is to get up and do something. Don't wait for good things to happen to you. If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope, you will fill yourself with hope."

Barack Obama