

Extreme heat safety tips for older adults

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As older adults age, their ability to regulate body temperature becomes increasingly more difficult, especially during hot summer months. The heat can have a significant, rapid impact on them—and it can even happen within minutes. A Baylor College of Medicine expert provides

tips for older adults to avoid heat-related emergencies.

"As we get older, our bodies don't self-regulate temperature as well as when we were younger," said Dr. Angela Catic, assistant professor in the Roy M. and Phyllis Gough Huffington Center on Aging at Baylor. "This is due to physiological changes, medical issues and prescription medications, which can interfere with regulating our body temperature and prevent perspiring, which helps us cool down."

Catic said that in high temperatures, the safest option is for older adults to stay in an indoor, air-conditioned space. If their home lacks air conditioning, they should visit a friend or family member's home or a public place like a library, church or heat shelter. To keep the home as cool as possible, use fans, keep blinds and shades drawn and avoid running the stove or other appliances that radiate heat.

Older adults may show different symptoms for varying heat-related illnesses, including heat stroke or heat exhaustion. With [heat stroke](#), they may experience red hot skin, fast heartrate, headache, lethargy and they can even faint. Heat exhaustion can bring heavy sweating or no sweating at all, muscle cramps, weakness, feeling cold or clammy to touch, dizziness, headache, nausea and vomiting. If you or an older adult you know experience heat-related issues:

- Go to a cooler area as quickly as possible
- Hydrate with noncaffeinated fluids, ideally water, juices or clear fluids
- Remove any heavy clothing
- Cool body temperature: Douse yourself with cool water or put cool cloths on your forehead, wrists and ankles

"If their temperature is elevated, that is a big concern. If they feel very ill (clammy, weak, dizzy, headache, nausea or vomiting), call 911 and

seek medical attention immediately," Catic said.

When the sun is at its peak, avoid being outdoors. If older adults are generally healthy and want to continue their outdoor activities, they must make sure to do this in the early morning or later evening hours when the sun starts to set. Make sure to only spend a few minutes outside and try to cut back on outdoor time until the heat improves. Prepare for the [heat](#) by hydrating and wearing the right clothing:

- Take plenty of fluids
- Wear loose, breathable, light-colored clothing
- Wear a wide-brim hat that allows air to get through to cool you
- Use broad-spectrum SPF starting at SPF 30

"Check in on older adults in your lives to make sure they're doing well. It's important for all of us with weather this extreme, but especially older adults, who can be affected relatively quickly," Catic said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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