

Heart experts have tips on staying safe in the summer heat

July 6 2024, by Robin Foster



As Americans brace themselves for another summer of brutal heat and humidity, the American Heart Association (AHA) warns that heart patients need to take extra precautions to protect themselves.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 1,200 people die in this country each year as a direct cause of [extreme heat](#).

"Heat-related deaths and illnesses are mostly preventable if proper safety measures are taken," AHA President Dr. Joseph Wu said in an AHA news release. "Precautions are especially important for infants and [older adults](#) and people with [high blood pressure](#), obesity or a history of heart disease or stroke. While some people are more vulnerable to problems from heat, [extreme temperatures](#) can cause health issues for anyone."

And [heart patients](#) may be more vulnerable than most: A study published recently in the AHA journal [Circulation](#) predicts that cardiovascular disease deaths related to extreme heat may more than double over the next two decades.

So, what should folks do as temperatures soar?

Wu suggested that everyone follows these hot weather precautions:

- **Watch the clock:** Avoid the outdoors in the early afternoon, because the sun is usually at its strongest, putting you at higher risk for heat-related illnesses
- **Dress for heat:** Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing in breathable fabrics, such as cotton or a newer fabric that repels sweat. Add a hat and sunglasses. Before you get started, apply a water-resistant sunscreen with at least SPF 15, and reapply it every two hours
- **Drink up:** Stay hydrated by drinking a few cups of water before, during and after going outside or exercising. Avoid caffeinated

or alcoholic beverages



Take regular breaks: Find some shade or a cool place, stop for a few minutes, hydrate and start again

If those precautions don't work, it's important to know when you may be experiencing too much heat.

Symptoms of heat exhaustion:

- Headaches
- Cool, pale and moist skin
- Fast, weak pulse
- Dizziness and light-headedness
- Weakness or muscle cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Passing out

If you experience these symptoms, move to a cooler place, stop exercising, douse yourself with cold water and re-hydrate. You may need to seek medical attention.

Heat stroke is a medical emergency: Call 9-1-1 and get [medical attention](#) right away if you have these symptoms:

- High body temperature (103 degrees Fahrenheit or higher)
- Hot, red, dry or damp skin
- Fast, strong pulse
- Headache, dizziness and confusion
- Nausea
- Passing out

While being heart-smart in the heat, it's still important to find ways to

stay active during the summer.

Adjusting your exercise time to early morning or later in the evening can help. And if being outside is just too much on some days, head to a shopping mall, gym or community recreation center for a workout.

More information: Harvard Health has more on [heat and heart disease](#)

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