

Summer Storm Emergencies – Hot Weather Safety

Too much heat is not safe for anyone. It is even riskier if you are older or have health problems. It is important to get relief from the heat quickly. More Americans are killed by hot weather than by any other natural disaster.

Heat-Related Illness

Being hot for too long can cause several illnesses, all grouped under the name *hyperthermia*. Your risk of developing heat-related illness increases with the *heat index*, which is a combination of air temperature and humidity. High humidity makes your sweat roll off your skin without evaporating or cooling the body. Wearing too much clothing in warm temperatures also increases your risk of being ill.

Heat illness or *hyperthermia* occurs when there is an unusual increase in core body temperature. Unlike fever, it does not respond to medications. It is therefore extremely important to recognize early symptoms of heat exhaustion.

Older people have an increased risk of developing heat stress because many of them do not have air-conditioning or fans. Some of them may not be aware of *when* to get out of the heat, or they may be physically unable to get out of an overheated home.

Other factors that increase one's risk of heat-related illnesses include *dehydration*, which is common among the elderly, and the use of certain medications such as beta blockers.

Obese individuals, and those with fever, heart disease, poor circulation, mental illness, and sunburn are also at risk.

Use a Buddy System

Heat-induced illness can cause a person to become confused or lose consciousness. People who are 65 or older should have someone check on them twice a day during a *heat wave*.



Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke

Heat exhaustion is less severe, more common, and occurs when the body becomes severely dehydrated. If left untreated, it leads to heat stroke.

Signs of Heat Exhaustion

- Heavy sweating
- Cold, clammy skin
- Dizziness or fainting
- A weak and rapid pulse
- Muscle cramps
- Fast, shallow breathing
- Nausea, vomiting or both

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. When the body is unable to control its temperature, it rises rapidly and sweating mechanisms fail. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within 10–15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause

Caregiving in The Comfort of Home®

Our Purpose

To provide caregivers with critical information enabling them to do their job with confidence, pride, and competence.

Ordering Info

From the publishers of

*Caregiving in
The Comfort of Home®
Caregiver Series*

available from...

CareTrust Publications LLC
PO Box 10283, Portland, OR 97296
800-565-1533
or www.comfortofhome.com

Comments and suggestions welcome.

©2019 CareTrust Publications LLC.
All rights reserved. Reproduction of any component of this publication is forbidden without a license from the publisher.

Some content in this publication is excerpted from *The Comfort of Home: Caregivers Series*. It is for informational use and not health advice. It is not meant to replace medical care but to supplement it. The publisher assumes no liability with respect to the accuracy, completeness or application of information presented or the reader's misunderstanding of the text.

SAFETY TIPS—Before a Blackout – Be Prepared

Losing electrical power often means losing more than lights: refrigeration, water supplies, and cell phones all depend on a power supply. If you are *warned* of a coming blackout:

- Keep electricity use as low as possible to help power companies avoid rolling blackouts.
- Fill plastic containers with water and freezer them. Leave about an inch of space inside each one, because water expands as it freezes. This ice will help keep food cold during a power outage.
- Most medication that needs refrigeration can be kept in a closed refrigerator for several hours without a problem. If unsure, check with your physician or pharmacist.
- Keep your vehicle's gas tank at least half full because gas stations rely on electricity to power their pumps.
- Know where the *manual* release lever of the electric garage door opener is located and how to operate it. Garage doors are heavy, so you may need help to lift it. Always keep the garage door key with you.

Source: www.Ready.gov

NEXT ISSUE... EMERGENCIES - IS THE PERSON WITH ALZHEIMER'S IN PAIN

death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

Signs of Heat Stroke

- Extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)
- Red, hot, dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache, dizziness, nausea
- Confusion or unconsciousness

These are signs of a life-threatening emergency.

Have someone call 911 while you begin cooling the person by getting him to a shady area and cool him rapidly by immerse him in a cool tub of water or shower; spray him with cool water from a garden hose; sponge him with cool water.

If he is conscious and able to swallow, give cool water or nonalcoholic, decaffeinated beverages.

Source: American Heart Association; Department of Health and Human Services; Caregiving in the Comfort of Home

Emergency Planning

Recovering from a natural disaster tomorrow often depends on the planning and preparation done *today*.

In addition to the supplies of food, water and first aid kits, consider these precautions:

- ☞ Create a **network of friends and neighbors**. Show everyone how to operate *essential* equipment.
- ☞ List the type and **model numbers of medical devices**, like oxygen tanks and wheelchairs.
- ☞ If the person in your care is in a wheelchair or has **mobility problems**, plan for how they will evacuate.
- ☞ For blind or visually impaired persons, keep an **extra cane** by the bed and **attach a whistle** to it.
- ☞ For hearing impaired, **store hearing aids in a container** attached to the nightstand or bedpost, so they can be located quickly.
- ☞ Have **ID information** for the person as well as copies of emergency documents, evacuation plans and emergency health information card.
- ☞ Ask your doctor about stocking up on a **week's supply of all prescription medication**.
- ☞ Know where the first-aid kit and **emergency supplies are located**.
- ☞ Make a **communication plan** with an out-of-state contact so you will know how to contact one another.
- ☞ Designate a **backup provider** in case you can't reach the person in your care.

In an emergency, Alzheimer or dementia patients can sense when something is wrong. Remain calm, explain what is happening simply, and give clear directions.

Source: CDC; FEMA; www.agingcare.com



Taking Care of Yourself— Stay Hydrated, Stay Safe

Not drinking enough fluids increases the risk of falling. In addition, the dizziness, as a sign of heat exhaustion, can cause a fall.

While being properly hydrated is always important, in summer heat it can be lifesaving. Our natural sense of thirst diminishes with age so it is important to drink water "by the clock," as you would schedule crucial medications. This allows better absorption of nutrients from foods as well as medications, and reduces the risk of dehydration.

Dehydration, especially in the elderly, can increase confusion and muscle weakness and cause nausea. Nausea, in turn, will prevent the person from wanting to eat, thereby causing more dehydration.

Avoid serving caffeine and alcohol, which cause frequent urination and dehydration

Source: NIH News In Health, Department of Health and Human Services; CDC



Inspiration

The best sermons are lived, not preached.

Live Life Laughing!

I keep hitting "escape", but I'm still here!



Memory Care - Alzheimer's and Dehydration

People with Alzheimer's are more likely to experience dehydration. They often forget to drink, have difficulty swallowing, or may not be able to express their needs. Some may avoid taking fluids if they are incontinent. Dehydration is a major reason why many adults suffering from dementia are treated in the emergency room.