

## Heat Waves & Storms—Stay Cool, Stay Safe

High humidity and elevated nighttime temperatures are key ingredients in causing heat-related illness and mortality. Heat stress occurs when the body is unable to cool itself effectively. Normally, the body can cool itself through sweating, but when humidity is high, sweat will not evaporate as quickly, potentially leading to *heat stroke*. When there's no break from the heat at night, it can lead to health problems, and pose *special* health risks to the poor, older adults and people with chronic medical conditions. It is important that seniors know how to safeguard against the risks. Air conditioning is one of the best protections against heat-related illness and death. Visit senior centers, movie theaters, libraries or malls to cool off—even for just a few hours.

**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 death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

### Signs of Heat Stroke

- High body temperature (above 103°F)
- Red, hot, dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness, nausea, confusion
- Unconsciousness

These are signs of a **life-threatening emergency. Have someone call 911** while you begin cooling the person:

- Get him to a shady area.
- Cool him rapidly, however you can: Immerse him in a cool tub of water or shower; spray him with cool water from a garden hose; sponge him with cool water; wrap him in a cool, wet sheet and fan him vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature; continue cooling efforts until body temperature drops to 101–102°F.
- If he is conscious and able to swallow, give cool water or nonalcoholic, decaffeinated beverages.



Adapted from The Comfort of Home: Caregiver Series, © 2018 CareTrust Publications, www.comfortofhome.com

## SAFETY TIPS—Keep Food Safe

It's easier for bacteria to grow on food in hot summer months. Older people get sick easier from germs in food. Always wash your own hands and the hands of the person in your care with warm soapy water before preparing or serving food. Dry hands with a paper towel.

- ★ Discard all foods that are past the expiration date on the label.
- ★ Never leave meats out at room temperature.
- ★ Thoroughly cook all red meat and fish at 300° F or more.
- ★ Cook hamburgers or chopped meat until the juices run clear.
- ★ Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.
- ★ Cook eggs until the yolks are no longer runny and never serve raw eggs in drinks.
- ★ Never serve oysters, clams, or shellfish raw.
- ★ Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly.
- ★ Avoid unpasteurized milk and cider.
- ★ Be careful if you use the microwave oven. Make sure the food has no cold spots that let germs live. Stir the food for even cooking.

NEXT ISSUE... PARKINSON DISEASE – FITNESS AND EXERCISE

### 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.

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**Heat exhaustion** is less severe, more common, and occurs when the body becomes severely dehydrated. If left untreated, it leads to heat stroke. If you suspect a person is having a problem with the heat, err on the side of caution and insist they get into shade and cool down.

**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

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

**Storm Readiness – Take Protective Measures**

Recovering from an emergency or a natural disaster tomorrow often depends on the planning and preparation done *today*. Talk to the doctor to determine if the person in your care needs to be admitted to a hospital prior to the emergency. In addition to the standard supplies of food, water and first aid kits (listed on Red Cross or FEMA websites), consider additional precautions:

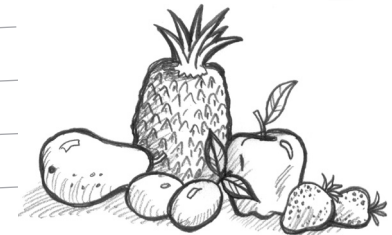
- ✓ Create a **network of neighbors**, relatives, friends and co-workers. Discuss your needs and make sure everyone knows how to operate necessary medical equipment.
- ✓ List the type and **model numbers of medical devices**, like oxygen tanks and wheelchairs.
- ✓ Note **medications that require refrigeration** and have a cooler chest and frozen ice packs ready.
- ✓ If the person in your care is in a wheelchair or has **mobility problems**, plan for how they will evacuate. Have a manual wheelchair as a backup for a motorized one.
- ✓ Be prepared to **bring your own durable medical equipment** to an evacuation shelter.
- ✓ 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**.
- ✓ Make sure everyone knows where the first-aid kit and **emergency supplies are located**.

Source: CDC; FEM

*Taking Care of Yourself*—**Increase Your Energy**

Being a caregiver whether you are young or are a grandmother is tough and you are under physical and emotional stress, so it is important to avoid foods that tend to make you anxious and more stressed. Try to:

1. Drink plenty of water.
  2. Have extra Vitamin C, such as a glass of orange juice.
  3. Eat fruit, whole grain breads, and pastas for energy.
  4. Avoid sweetened drinks, colas, coffee, and tea which can make you jumpy and provide no nutrition.
  5. Avoid alcohol. It puts more stress on your body in the long run.
- Remember to take care of YOU!



**Dehydration**

As a person ages, he or she feels less thirsty, so a special effort should be made to provide fluids to prevent dehydration. A person's fluid balance can be affected by medication and emotional stress.

*Inspiration*

*Experience, or what we call experience, is not the inventory of our pains, but rather the learned sympathy of the pain of others.*

~ Juan Gabriel Vasquez

**Live Life Laughing!**

Never make fun of me when teaching me how to use a computer. I taught you how to use a spoon!



**Memory Care**

Monitor the person in your care. Remember, he may not be able to tell when he is becoming over-heated, or may not be able to express his discomfort, especially if suffering from dementia or diabetes, which diminishes sensation. Alcohol and some medications, such as tranquilizers, can dull an individual's awareness of discomfort.