

Heat stress in the elderly

Elderly people (people aged 65 years and older) are more prone to heat stress than younger people for several reasons:

- Elderly people don't adjust as well as young people to sudden changes in temperature.
- They're more likely to have a chronic medical condition, such as diabetes or asthma that may interfere with normal body responses to heat.
- They are more likely to take prescription medicines that impair the body's ability to regulate its temperature or that inhibit perspiration.

HEAT STROKE

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. It happens when the body is not able to control its temperature. Body temperature rises rapidly, the body loses its ability to sweat and it is unable to cool down. With heat stroke, body temperatures can rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Without emergency treatment, heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability. **Warning signs of heat stroke** may include:

- Extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea

HEAT EXHAUSTION

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. **Warning signs of heat exhaustion** may include the following:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle Cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Skin: may be cool and moist
- Pulse rate: fast and weak
- Breathing: fast and shallow

HELPING YOUR ELDERLY RELATIVES AND NEIGHBORS

If you have elderly relatives or neighbors, you can help them protect themselves from heat-related illnesses:

- Visit older adults at least twice a day and watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Take them to air-conditioned locations if they have transportation problems.
- Make sure older adults have access to an electric fan whenever possible – although use of electric fans alone will not prevent heat illness once it has begun.

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

If you see any signs of severe heat stress, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call 911 or get immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the affected person as follows:

- Get the person to a shady area.
- Cool the person rapidly, using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the person with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101°–102°F
- If emergency medical help is delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.
- Do not give the person alcohol to drink.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

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