



Extreme heat – health advice

People with ongoing physical or mental health conditions

If you have a physical or mental health condition such as heart disease, high blood pressure, or diabetes, or you take certain medications (for depression, anxiety, insomnia or poor circulation), you are at higher risk of health problems during the heat and may be more affected by extreme heat than others.

The medications you take may change your perception of the heat and how you respond to extremely hot weather, causing you to become dehydrated more quickly and to either sweat less or sweat more.

Since the body cools itself during hot temperatures by sweating, any change to your ability to sweat may be critical to your health.



Keeping healthy

Take some extra precautions during the heat to prevent heat-related illnesses.

- Listen to the weather reports on the radio or TV and try to plan ahead for hot days to avoid becoming affected by the heat.
- Ask your doctor exactly what your risks are during the heat so you are aware of what you need to do to look after yourself.
- Continue to take your prescribed medication(s) every day at the same time you normally do.
- Try to ensure that your daily routine continues as usual.
- Stay in touch regularly (at least daily) with family, friends and neighbours, especially if you live alone.
- Keep a check of how you are feeling during hot weather.
- Find out the signs of heat-related illness, so you know what to do if your body starts to feel the effects of heat (for example, dizziness, muscle cramps or spasms, headaches, nausea).
- Call your doctor (GP) or health professional if you feel or become unwell during the heat.

If you are not able to speak to your GP or health professional then go, or get someone to take you, to the Emergency Department of your nearest hospital, OR ring 000 for an ambulance if your symptoms worsen.

Keeping cool

- Stay in a cool place and use your fan or air-conditioner (on cool) if you have one.
- Place a bowl of ice cubes in front of an electric fan for a cooling breeze.
- Rest and take a nap when you can in a cool, darkened room.
- Have a spray bottle filled with water to cool your face and body.
- A wet face-washer or towel on your head or neck is cooling.
- Have a cool shower or bath, or put your feet in a large bowl of cold water to help you cool down.
- Make ice cubes from water or cordial and suck them to keep cool.
- Sleep with just a sheet over you and wear few night clothes.
- Avoid going out in the hottest times of the day, unless you have to. Try to stay in the shade where possible, or where there is air-conditioning, for example, shopping centres or a local library.

Drinking and eating

- Try to drink extra water or diluted fruit juice even if you don't feel thirsty. If you have a medical condition that affects how much you drink, check with your doctor.
- Don't wait until you are thirsty to have a drink as you may be dehydrated by then.
- Always carry bottled cold water with you when you go out.
- Eat smaller meals more often and less hot foods.
- Eat more light meals such as salads and plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Avoid drinking tea, coffee or alcohol.



Clothing and outdoors protection

- When you are at home wear as little clothing as possible to help keep cool.
- Lightweight and loose-fitting clothes allow sweat to evaporate from your body.
- Light-coloured fabrics will reflect light and heat and will be cooler to wear, as well as helping maintain a normal body temperature.
- Natural fibre fabrics made of cotton, linen and silk are better to wear as they absorb sweat, allow the skin to breathe and do not stick to the body in the same way as synthetic fabrics do.
- When outdoors, wear a wide-brimmed hat (at least 7.5cm wide), or a legionnaire or bucket-style hat. Make sure it shades your face, neck and ears.
- When going outside, don't forget sunglasses to reduce glare on your eyes.
- Broad-spectrum sunscreen (minimum SPF30+) is a must when outdoors as your medications may make you more prone to getting burnt. Apply 20 minutes before exposure to the sun, and re-apply every two hours, especially if you spend time in the water.

Remember, if you do not feel well, seek medical assistance without delay.

For more information, visit www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/peh/alerts/standing_health_alerts/extreme_heat