
How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat

Tips to survive the heat

- Drink water, even if you don't feel thirsty. Take a bottle with you always.
 - Hot cars kill. Never leave kids, older people or pets in cars. The temperature inside a parked car can double within minutes.
 - Keep cool. Seek out air-conditioned buildings, draw your blinds, use a fan, take cool showers and dress in light and loose clothing made from natural fabrics.
 - Plan ahead. Schedule activities in the coolest part of the day and avoid exercising in the heat. If you must go out, wear a hat and sunscreen and take a bottle of water with you.
 - Check in on others. Look after those most at risk in the heat – your neighbour living alone, the elderly, the young, people with a medical condition and don't forget your pets.
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During extreme heat it is easy to become dehydrated or for your body to overheat. If this happens, you may develop heat cramps, heat exhaustion or even heatstroke. Heatstroke is a medical emergency which can result in permanent damage to your vital organs, or even death, if not treated immediately. Extreme heat can also make existing medical conditions worse.

The best way to survive the heat is to plan ahead for hot days and know what to do when the heat hits. Hot weather can affect anyone, including the young and healthy. However, some people are more at risk than others.

People most at risk:

- are aged over 65 years, especially those living alone
- have a medical condition such as diabetes, kidney disease or mental illness
- are taking medications that may affect the way the body reacts to heat such as:
 - allergy medicines (antihistamines)
 - blood pressure and heart medicines (beta-blockers)
 - seizure medicines (anticonvulsants)
 - water pills (diuretics)
 - antidepressants or antipsychotics
- have problematic alcohol or drug use
- have a disability
- have trouble moving around such as those who are bed bound or in wheelchairs
- pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers
- babies and young children
- are overweight or obese
- work or exercise outdoors
- have recently arrived from cooler climates.

Coping with the heat

During extreme heat, whether it's one hot day or a heatwave, remember:

- Drink plenty of water, even if you don't feel thirsty (if your doctor normally limits your fluids, check how much to drink during hot weather).
 - Keep yourself cool by using wet towels, putting your feet in cool water and taking cool (not cold) showers.
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- Spend as much time as possible in cool or air-conditioned buildings (shopping centres, libraries, cinemas or community centres).
- Block out the sun at home during the day by closing curtains and blinds.
- Open the windows when there is a cool breeze.
- Stay out of the sun during the hottest part of the day. If you do have to go outside, wear a hat and sunscreen, and seek shade.
- Cancel or postpone outings. If you absolutely must go out, stay in the shade and take plenty of water with you.
- Wear light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing made from natural fibres like cotton and linen.
- Eat smaller meals more often and cold meals such as salads.
- Make sure food that needs refrigeration is properly stored.
- Avoid heavy activity like sport, renovating and gardening.
- Watch or listen to news reports to find out more information during extreme heat.

Practical hot weather resources

Everyone can be affected by hot weather and it is important that you take care whenever the temperatures start to rise. A heatwave over a period of days, or even a single day of extreme heat, may cause illnesses such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke.

It's important to stay aware of the weather during summer, especially when there are risks of heatwaves or days of high UV. For more information on weather conditions, see:

- **Victorian seven-day forecast** – Bureau of Meteorology
- **UV alert** – Cancer Council Victoria

You can also register to get **Heat Health Alerts** from the Department of Health & Human Services.

When out enjoying the summer, always remember hot weather can spoil food quickly. Make sure you follow safe food practices to avoid illness.

You can get first aid information and resources from **St John Ambulance**.

Older people and hot weather

Heat stress may affect older people more than others. People aged 65 years and over may be at increased risk of heat-related illnesses and need special care in hot weather. Factors that can increase a person's risk include living alone, chronic medical problems and certain medication.

Children and hot weather

Babies and young children should be watched carefully during hot weather. They can quickly lose body fluids through perspiring, which can lead to dehydration. They need to drink regularly, wear light clothing and be kept cool. Never leave babies or young children in cars. The temperature inside parked cars can double within minutes.

The **Never leave kids in cars** page has more information about child car safety.

Active people and hot weather

Heat and sport or physical activity (exercise) can be a dangerous combination. Heat stress occurs when sweat can't evaporate fast enough to keep the body sufficiently cool. You can prevent heat stress during sport by drinking plenty of fluids, taking frequent rest breaks and avoiding exercise during the hottest part of the day.

How you can help others

In extreme heat, check on and help other people who may be at a higher risk of heat-related illness:

- Keep in touch with sick or frail friends and family.
- Call them at least once on any extreme heat day.
- Encourage them to drink plenty of water.
- Offer to help family, friends and neighbours who are aged over 65 or have an illness by doing shopping or other errands so they can avoid the heat. Take them somewhere cool for the day or have them stay the night if they are unable to stay cool in their home.
- If you observe symptoms of heat-related illness, seek medical help.

Prepare for extreme heat

You can prepare for extreme heat by:

- Stocking up on food, water and medicines so you don't have to go out in the heat. Visit your doctor to check if changes are needed to your medicines during extreme heat.
- Storing medicines safely at the recommended temperature.
- Checking that your fan or air-conditioner works well. Have your air-conditioner serviced if necessary.
- Looking at the things you can do to make your home cooler such as installing window coverings, shade cloths or external blinds on the sides of the house facing the sun.

Prepare for a power failure

Power failures can happen during times of extremely hot weather. Some things you can do to prepare for a power failure are:

- Ensure you have a torch, fully charged mobile phone, a battery operated radio and some spare batteries.
- Stock up on food items that do not require refrigeration or cooking such as tinned fruit and vegetables, tinned meats or fish, bread and fruit.
- Have plenty of drinking water available.
- Stock up on medications and other essential items.
- Consider a battery-operated or hand held fan to assist with cooling.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, call triple zero (000)
- Your doctor – if you, or someone you know, may be suffering from a heat-related illness
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Department of Health & Human Services – survive the heat information in community languages.
- Maternal and Child Health Line, Victoria Tel. 132 229 (24 hours)

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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