

Extreme Heat



Guide to coping and
staying healthy in the heat



Government
of South Australia

SA Health



During extremely hot weather, 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 can result in permanent damage to your body, including your brain, or even death if not treated immediately.

As we live in a State which can experience long periods of extreme heat, it is important to know what the effects of extreme heat are, who is at risk and how you can prepare for and cope during times of extreme heat.

This guide provides:

- > information on heat related conditions and what to do if you have any symptoms
- > practical tips on preparing for and coping during extreme heat
- > emergency treatment for people affected by the heat while waiting for an ambulance
- > helpful tips for recovering from the heat when it is over.

Additional information in relation to babies and young children, older children and teenagers, the elderly, people with mental health conditions and caring for pets during the heat, can be found on the SA Health website

www.health.sa.gov.au

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What are the risks?

Dehydration

- > The symptoms of dehydration include dizziness, tiredness, irritability, thirst and loss of appetite
- > Heat exhaustion and heatstroke can also occur
- > If you already have medical conditions (such as heart or breathing problems) heat can make your symptoms worse.

What to do

- > Drink plenty of water or fruit juice and avoid tea, coffee or alcohol
- > You should move somewhere cool, ideally somewhere air-conditioned or with a fan. Avoid sitting too close to a fan as this can make dehydration worse
- > If possible, use a spray bottle with water in it to cool yourself down
- > If you start to feel unwell, you should seek medical advice as soon as possible.

Heat cramps

- > Heat cramps can occur during strenuous activity such as sport, or gardening in hot weather. They are caused by your body losing salt when you sweat
- > The symptoms of heat cramps are muscle spasms, usually in the arms, legs or stomach, and moist, cool skin.

What to do

- > Drink plenty of water or fruit juice
- > Have a cool shower or bath
- > Lie in a cool place with your legs slightly raised and supported on a pillow or something similar
- > Massage your limbs to ease the spasms then apply cool packs if available.



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Heat exhaustion

- > The symptoms of heat exhaustion include headaches, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, muscle weakness or cramps, pale skin and a high temperature.

What to do

- > If you think you may have heat exhaustion, drink plenty of water or fruit juice but take small sips
- > Move to somewhere cooler. If possible move to an air-conditioned room but if this is not possible, go to the coolest room in your home, usually the bathroom or laundry
- > Take a cool shower or bath, sponge yourself down with cool water or have wet flannels or towels close by to wipe down the body
- > Lie down in a cool place, wearing loose clothing and apply wet flannels/towels to your head and body, or get someone to do this for you if possible
- > Put cool packs under your armpits, on the groin, or on the back of the neck (or all 3 places) to reduce body heat
- > **If vomiting continues, you need to get medical assistance immediately. Either call an ambulance by dialling 000, or get someone to take you to your nearest hospital Emergency Department.**



Heatstroke

- > Heatstroke is an immediate medical emergency. Ring 000 immediately for an ambulance.
- > If heat exhaustion is left untreated, heatstroke can develop. It can also happen suddenly and without warning so being aware of the symptoms is very important
- > Symptoms of heatstroke include headaches, nausea, a very strong feeling of being thirsty, sleepiness, hot red and dry skin (because sweating has stopped), a sudden rise in body temperature, confusion, slurred speech, aggressive or bizarre behaviour, convulsions and loss of consciousness, seizures or coma
- > Heatstroke can result in permanent damage to your body, including your brain, or can result in death. If not treated straight away, about 80% of people who get heatstroke will die.

What to do

- > Read the information on Emergency Treatment (see page 11) so you know what to do while waiting for the ambulance to come if you, or someone you know, gets heatstroke.



emergency

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Who is at risk?

Everyone is at risk during extremely hot weather but some groups of people have a higher risk of becoming ill than others. It is very important that people in these groups take extra care of themselves during hot weather. It is also important that friends, family and neighbours of people in these groups keep in contact with these people regularly to make sure they are coping with the extreme heat.

The groups at greater risk are:

- > The elderly, particularly those who are frail
- > Babies and young children
- > Pregnant women
- > People who have difficulty keeping cool, for example people with physical disabilities
- > A person with a high temperature from an existing infection
- > Anyone who is confined to bed
- > People with dementia or Alzheimer's
- > People with heart or breathing problems, diabetes, serious mental illness, or who are very overweight
- > People taking certain types of medications
- > Those who live on their own or who don't live close to other people
- > People who work outdoors, or who are physically active (gardeners or labourers).



Being prepared for extreme heat

Planning ahead and being prepared for extreme heat is important and there are several things that you can do as hot weather approaches to reduce your risk of being affected if/when it occurs.

Before the weather gets hot

- > Regularly check the local heat forecast from the Bureau of Meteorology on your radio, TV or on the internet
- > Read our tips on how to look after yourself and your body during extremely hot weather (see pages 9 and 10)
- > Make sure you have supplies of food, bottled water and other items you use regularly (such as toothpaste, deodorant) to last up to a week so you do not have to go out in the heat unless absolutely necessary
- > If you take any medications, get advice from your doctor about whether your medication may affect what you should do when it gets extremely hot. Make sure you have enough medication to last for more than a week in case the weather is too hot to go outside
- > Do not forget your pets. Make sure you have a week's supply of food for them as the weather gets hotter, so you do not need to go and get it during the heat
- > Put together a small Emergency Kit. This might include a torch, batteries, candles, matches, manual can opener and battery operated radio in case the power goes off. You may also need a first-aid kit, thermometer and a list of important telephone numbers
- > Have a chat with a neighbour or relative/close friend about keeping in contact during extreme heat in case you, or they, need any help. Make sure you exchange phone numbers with them
- > Check that fridges and freezers work properly
- > Check fans and air-conditioners to make sure they work properly and check that your air conditioning is set to cool. Clean filters and air vents so your cooling system works properly

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- > If possible, have curtains with pale linings in rooms that get a lot of sunlight to help reflect the heat. Avoid dark reflective curtain linings and metal Venetian blinds as they absorb heat and may make rooms hotter
- > Consider putting external blinds, shutters or some other shading on windows in rooms which face west
- > Create a cool room or cool area to go to during extreme heat. This room or area ideally should be east or south facing in the house and can be cooled using indoor and outdoor shading, ventilation and use of a fan or air-conditioning
- > Check that your home can be properly ventilated without compromising security
- > Indoor plants can also help your home to look and keep cool.

Once the weather is hot

- > Keep out of the heat as much as possible
- > If you must go outside, try to do it in the early morning or evening when it is a little cooler and apply plenty of sunscreen regularly
- > Listen to your radio, watch the TV or check the internet for news and information from SA Health or the SA State Emergency Service (SASES) and follow any advice given
- > Follow your doctor's advice if you have any medical conditions
- > Never leave babies, children or animals alone in a car even if the air-conditioner is on.

Staying cool

- > Apply plenty of sunscreen regularly
- > Wear a hat or take an umbrella with you for shade if you have to walk outside
- > Wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose fitting cotton clothing with long sleeves
- > Draw blinds and curtains to keep out the heat during the day
- > Have plenty of cold water and ice in the fridge
- > Use a fan or air-conditioner set to cool
- > Keep physical activities to a minimum
- > Rest if you feel tired to conserve your energy
- > Splash cool water on your face and back of the neck
- > Take a cool shower or bath to cool yourself down when you feel hot. If this is not possible use a wet flannel or towel to wipe yourself down.

Drink and eat regularly

- > It is important to drink water or fruit juice even if you don't feel thirsty
- > Carry a bottle of cold water with you if you leave your home or workplace
- > Avoid drinking alcohol, tea or coffee as they can make dehydration worse
- > Avoid eating salty foods
- > Try to eat the same amount as you would normally even if you don't feel like eating as your body needs energy to cope with the heat
- > Avoid large meals and have smaller amounts of food spread throughout the day
- > Try to eat more cold food such as salads and fruit which contain water and are more refreshing in hot weather than cooked foods.

Food storage and preparation

- > Keep food out of the sun as the heat increases the risk of bacteria growing which may cause food poisoning
- > Only take foods out of your fridge when you need them and have them out for the shortest time possible. The temperature of the fridge should be between 0°C and 5°C

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- > Defrost foods in the fridge, not on the kitchen bench. Do not re-freeze any food after defrosting it. It should be cooked or thrown out if you don't use it on the day of defrosting
- > Throw out leftover foods in the fridge if they have been there more than 3 days
- > Wash your hands or use antibacterial hand gel before preparing any food
- > Use different preparation boards for meat and vegetables to avoid contaminating food. Clean well after use
- > Do not reheat foods more than once. Food poisoning bacteria and viruses can multiply rapidly in food and can still grow in the fridge if it is not cold enough.

Watch your health

- > Watch out for any symptoms of heat related illness (see pages 2, 4 and 5)
- > If you have any symptoms, rest for several hours, try to keep cool and drink plenty of water or fruit juice
- > If the symptoms do not go away or if you start to feel worse, **seek medical advice urgently**:
 - contact your doctor
 - call *healthdirect Australia* on 1800 002 222 or
 - go to the Emergency Department of your nearest hospital.
- > If your symptoms are serious call an ambulance immediately on 000.

Help others

- > Check daily on friends, relatives and neighbours, especially if they live on their own
- > If possible, assist others with any special needs they have to help them cope during the heat
- > Help others to get advice and support if they need it.

Emergency treatment for a person affected by heat

Heatstroke can kill. It can happen suddenly and quickly lead to unconsciousness.

If you think someone has heatstroke, call 000 immediately for an ambulance.

While waiting for the ambulance:

- > Move the person to somewhere cooler if possible and keep them as still as possible
- > Loosen their clothes then sprinkle the person with water, or wrap them in a damp sheet to cool them down as quickly as possible
- > Place damp cloths under the armpits, on the back of the neck and on the forehead of the person affected
- > Use a fan if one is available, or hand-fan with a book, or something similar
- > If the person is conscious, give them water or fruit juice
- > If the person is unconscious, keep a check on their breathing and pulse rate whilst you wait for an ambulance
- > Do not give aspirin or paracetamol to a person affected by heat
- > Open windows to allow some cool air to flow, unless it is hotter outside than inside
- > Try to keep the person calm and stay with them until the ambulance arrives.

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After the heat has passed

- > Continue to drink plenty of fluids so your body can get back in balance
- > Take time to rest and recover as coping with extremely hot weather can be very tiring
- > Go to your doctor if you feel unwell after the heat has passed
- > Open windows and doors to let your house cool down but make sure you don't compromise the security of your home
- > Contact family and friends to see if they have coped during the heat and if they now need help with anything
- > Think about how well you coped during this time of extreme heat and what, if anything, you would do differently next time
- > Make any changes in your home so it will be more comfortable for you during another time of extreme heat.



For more information

**Emergency Management Unit
Public Health and Clinical Coordination
SA Health
11 Hindmarsh Square
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Telephone: 8226 6000
E-mail: emergencymanagement@health.sa.gov.au
www.health.sa.gov.au**

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the Interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call The Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

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