

Summer wise

How to protect yourself
in hot weather



Thank you

Independent Age would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this guide was being developed, and those who reviewed the information for us.

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The sources used to create this publication are available on request.

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About this guide



While the summer may lift our spirits, temperatures can sometimes become uncomfortable and even dangerously hot. Anyone can be affected by the heat but you may be particularly at risk if you're living with a long-term health condition, such as a heart or breathing problem, or if you're on certain medications.

This guide looks at how to stay safe in hot weather, including how to look after yourself, keeping your home cool, and what to do if someone becomes unwell. Some of the tips may seem like common sense, but they can make a big difference to your wellbeing.

We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout.

In this guide you'll find references to our other free publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789** or visiting independentage.org/publications.

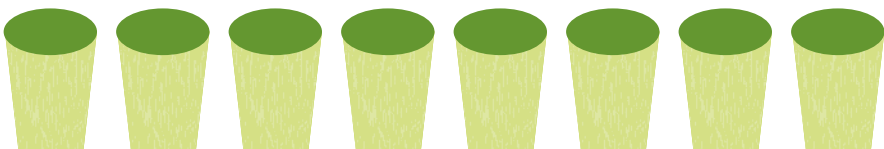
1 Looking after yourself



Changes in our bodies as we age mean we're less likely to notice when we feel hot, we take longer to cool down and we're less likely to feel thirsty. If you take precautions, you can avoid the worst effects of the sun.

Drink enough fluids

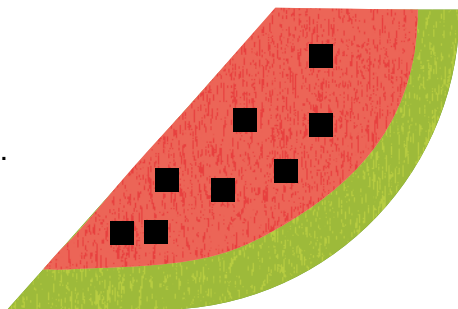
Drink more than usual in hot weather, even if you're not thirsty, to replace fluids lost through sweating. You need to drink about eight glasses (2 litres or 3½ pints) spread throughout the day – more if it's very hot. Have cool drinks like water and diluted fruit juice, and limit the number of drinks with caffeine in them (tea, coffee, cola, etc). Avoid excess alcohol and drinks that are high in sugar as these can dehydrate you. Keep an eye out for the symptoms of dehydration (see chapter 4).



“My mum struggled to drink as much as suggested in warm weather. She found it easier to take in larger quantities by using a straw for cold drinks. Small tumblers also seemed to be less daunting.”



Some foods contain a lot of water. Try to eat cold foods, especially salads, and fruits like watermelon. Make sure you wash fruit, salad and vegetables thoroughly and keep food in the fridge.



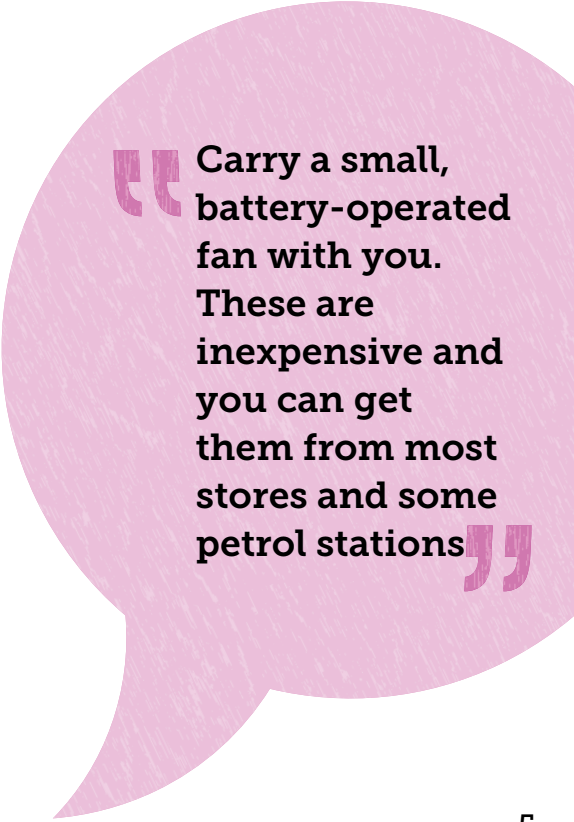
Warmer temperatures can increase the risk of food poisoning. Eat normally, even if the heat makes you feel less hungry. It may help to eat smaller, more frequent meals.

If you have to get up a lot in the night to go to the toilet, you may be tempted to reduce the amount you drink before going to bed. Avoid doing this when it's hot as you risk becoming dehydrated.

If you're fasting for Ramadan during a heatwave, make sure you drink before dawn and keep cool. People with some health conditions don't have to fast as it can risk their health. Speak to your imam about this. Consult your doctor if you choose to fast.

Keep cool

Avoid too much activity, especially at the hottest times of the day (between 11am and 3pm). Save essential housework or gardening for early morning or late evening. If you have to go out, try to stay in the shade as much as possible. Take a bottle of water, hat and sunscreen with you.



“ Carry a small, battery-operated fan with you. These are inexpensive and you can get them from most stores and some petrol stations.”

If it's cooler indoors than outdoors, then stay inside and help keep the heat out by closing the windows, curtains and blinds. However, metallic blinds and thick dark curtains can make the room hotter.

Buy a good-quality electric fan and make sure it's positioned in a safe place with no trailing wires. Fans can sometimes cause dehydration, so don't point them directly at you and drink water regularly. Turn off non-essential lights and electrical equipment that you're not using, as these can generate heat.

“ Putting a bowl of ice in front of a fan can reduce the temperature of the room and the dehydrating effects of the fan. ”



If it's still very hot at home, you could try going somewhere cool, such as your local library, cinema or place of worship.

Open your windows at night, if it's safe to do so, and when temperatures outside are lower, to cool your home down. Try to get the air flowing through.

A hot home can make it difficult to sleep and can make some medical conditions worse. If you're worried that the heat is affecting your health, seek medical advice.

“ Pets need special care too. Remember to give them access to plenty of fresh water and ensure that there is a relatively cool place for them to sit. ”



Dress for the weather

Wearing the right clothes can help you keep cool and protect you from the sun's radiation. At home wear as little as necessary. Light, loose-fitting, cotton clothes are best for staying cool in hot weather.

“ **My dad often had to be persuaded to look out lighter clothing from his limited wardrobe and he felt it was a waste of money to buy new. So we used his birthday and Father's Day in June to buy shorts and lighter shirts.** ”



If you're going out in direct sunlight, cover your skin as much as possible. Wear long sleeves and trousers or long skirts in fabrics with a close weave, and wear a hat. Choose one with a wide

brim or legionnaire style, with flaps around the ears and the back of the neck, so your face and neck are protected.

Wear sandals that support your feet, with adjustable straps if your feet swell in the summer.

“ **Fill a plastic bottle with water and keep it in the freezer. When you’re feeling too hot, you can use it to cool your feet by wrapping a towel round it and rolling your feet on it.** ”

Protect your skin and eyes

Too much radiation from ultraviolet (UV) light causes skin damage. There are two main types of UV rays: UVA, which penetrates deep into the skin, and UVB, which causes sunburn.

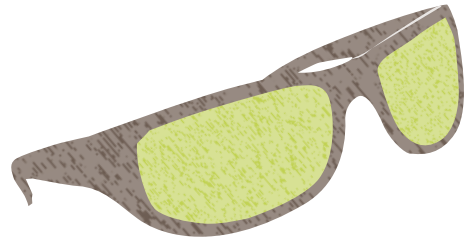
Sunscreen can offer some protection. The sun protection factor (SPF) measures UVB protection and the star rating is for UVA protection. Look for sunscreen that has both, sometimes called broad spectrum. You need at least SPF 15 and four or five star UVA protection, depending on your skin type.

Apply sunscreen generously half an hour before going out to give it time to dry and then again just before you go into the sun. Get someone to help you if you can. Don't forget places such as your ears, your head if you have thinning hair, and the soles of your feet if you're lying down. Sunscreen can rub off or you can sweat it off, so reapply it regularly and after you've been in water.

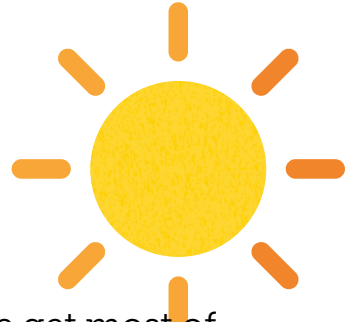


Check the expiry date on your sunscreen and don't store it in the heat. The open jar symbol on the bottle tells you how long it can be safely used after opening. When buying sunscreen, brand and price are less important than the SPF and star rating.

UV rays can also cause damage to your eyes, even when it's not hot or on a cloudy day, so wear sunglasses. Choose a pair with a CE mark, British Standard BS EN ISO 12312-1, or statement that they provide 100% UV protection (A and B). A wraparound design is best as this can protect your eyes from sun exposure from the front and sides.



Sunlight and vitamin D



While it's important to protect your skin, some exposure to sunlight is essential to the production of vitamin D, which we need for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. We get most of our vitamin D from sunlight exposure from around late March/early April to the end of September.

Unless the weather is extremely hot, try to go out in the sun every day for very short periods, especially between 11am and 3pm, without sunscreen and with your forearms, hands and lower legs uncovered. It's important to find a balance. Take care and cover up before your skin starts to turn red or burn. The NHS website has more information about vitamin D and sunlight ([nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-get-vitamin-d-from-sunlight](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/how-to-get-vitamin-d-from-sunlight)). One way to tell if the sun's UV rays are strong is to look at your shadow. If it's shorter than your height, you need to protect your skin.

Sitting indoors by a sunny window doesn't help to make vitamin D because UVB rays can't get through glass. Speak to your GP or a pharmacist if you're concerned you don't get enough exposure to the sun, for example if you're unable to leave the house

or you cover yourself completely for religious reasons. They may recommend other ways to get enough vitamin D, such as supplements.

Your medication

Some medications can make the effects of the heat worse. They can affect sweating and temperature control or make your skin more sensitive to the sun for example. Talk to your GP or pharmacist about how best to manage this, especially if you're taking a number of different medications or you have a long-term health condition. Keep taking your medication unless you've been told not to.

If you're on medication that affects the amount of fluid you're allowed to drink, get advice from your GP on what to do in hot weather.



Store your medication below 25°C or in the fridge. Check the storage instructions on the packaging. For more information see our guide **Living well with long-term health conditions**.

2 Planning ahead



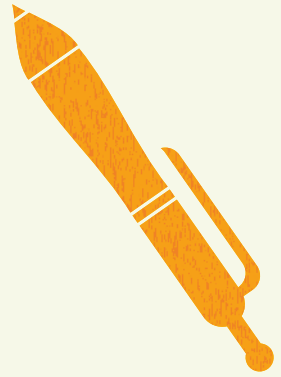
Check the weather forecast so you can plan ahead. Heatwaves can happen suddenly and it's a good idea to get organised before the weather gets hot.



The Meteorological Office (Met Office) has a warning system if a heatwave is likely. Listen out for heatwave warnings on television and on the radio, or check the Met Office website ([metoffice.gov.uk](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk)). You can also download the free Met Office weather app.

Air pollution can become worse during periods of hot weather. You can keep updated and get health advice and recommended action from UK-AIR (0800 55 66 77 (recorded information), uk-air.defra.gov.uk).

Checklist to help you prepare



- Make sure you've got enough supplies of food, water and any medication you need.
- Arrange extra support if you need it – for example, to help with shopping if it's too hot to go out.
- Check that your fridge and freezer are working properly.
- Make sure that any fans and air-conditioning are working.
- Check that you can open windows and vents so you can safely ventilate your home. Make sure there's no security risk. See our **Home security** guide for more details.
- Check that you can turn off your central heating.
- Consider getting some plants – these can help cool the air.
- Keep a thermometer in a commonly-used room, out of direct sunlight.



If your home gets uncomfortably hot in summer, find out if you're eligible for a home hazard assessment from your local council's environmental health department. You can find their contact details in the phone book or on [gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council).

You may also be able to get advice from a handyperson service or your local Home Improvement Agency (**0300 124 0315**, [findmyhia.org.uk](https://www.findmyhia.org.uk)) to stop your home getting too hot.



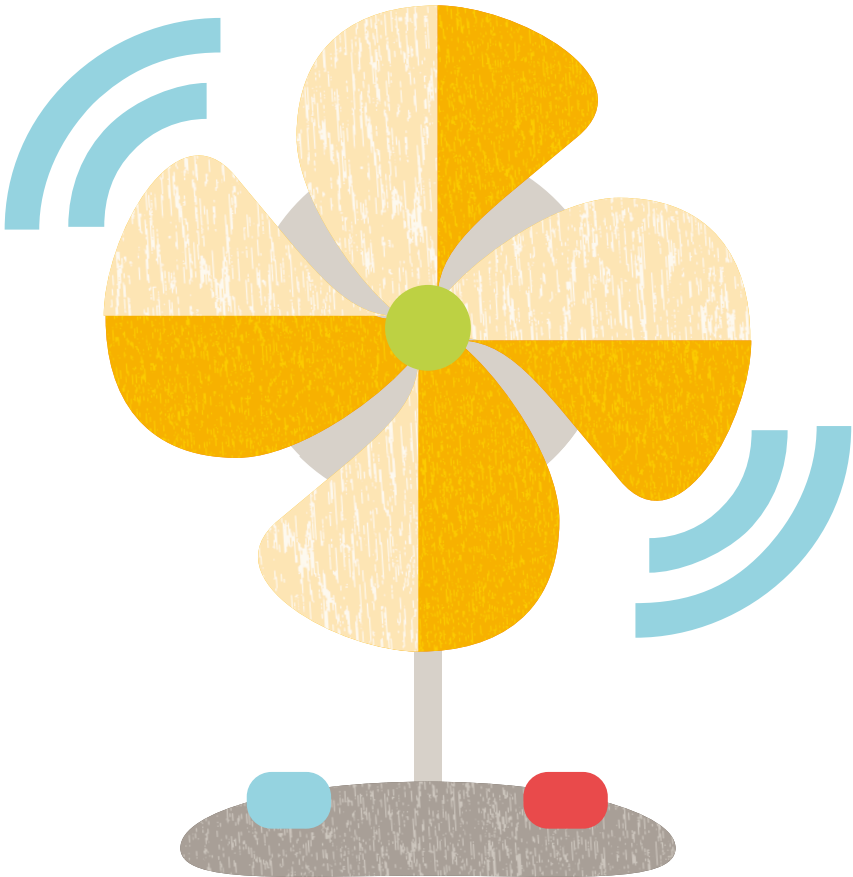
3 If you're living in a care home



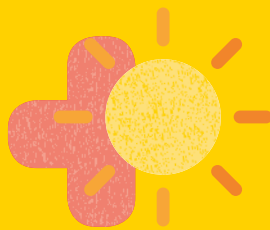
Your care home should have a plan for dealing with hot weather and heatwaves. The plan should include measures like:

- identify residents who are at higher risk of heat-related illness
- have enough fans and make sure there are cool areas that can be maintained at temperatures of 26° C or below
- install thermometers and check them regularly during the hottest periods
- turn off unnecessary lights and equipment
- reduce internal temperatures through shading and cool the building at night by opening windows
- provide water and ice and distribute drinks regularly
- provide wet towels and cool foot baths
- liaise with GPs about possible changes to residents' medication and when to supply rehydration salts for residents who are on high doses of diuretics (often called 'water tablets') which make the kidneys produce more urine.

If you're worried that your care home isn't doing enough to protect you from the heat, speak to the care home manager or matron. If the situation doesn't improve, you could make a complaint. See our factsheet **Complaints about care and health services** for more information.



4 Your health in hot weather



Older people can suffer adverse effects on their health during the hot weather. Long-term conditions may get worse and you may be more susceptible to dehydration, heat exhaustion or heatstroke. Keep an eye out for worrying symptoms.

Dehydration

Dehydration happens when you lose more fluid than you take in, by sweating for example.

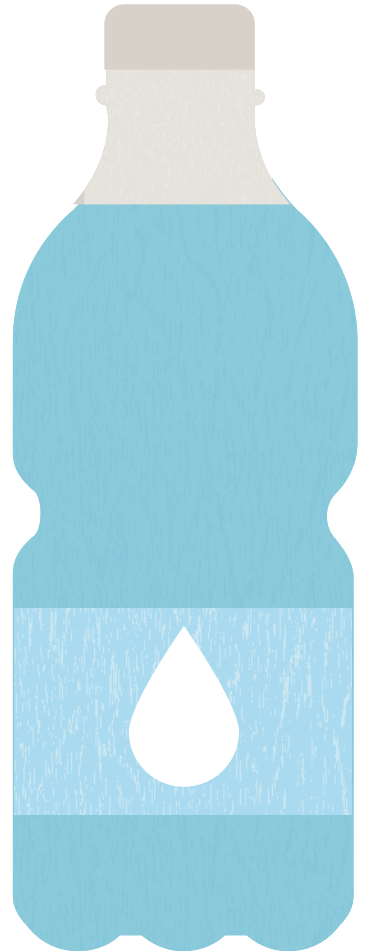
Symptoms can include:

- dizziness
- thirst
- dry mouth, lips and eyes
- headaches
- tiredness
- dark-coloured urine
- urinating little, and fewer than four times a day.

You might be more likely to become dehydrated if you have diabetes, dementia, difficulties with swallowing or if you're on certain medications. If you're caring for someone, keep a note of how much they drink, especially if they can't always drink without help.

You can become dehydrated before you feel thirsty. Make sure you drink plenty to reduce the risk. If you've been sick or have diarrhoea, ask your pharmacist about oral rehydration sachets to help replace the salt and minerals you've lost. If your symptoms don't improve, see your GP.

Serious dehydration needs medical attention. If untreated, it can lead to urine infections, muscle damage, constipation and kidney stones. Dehydration is also the main cause of heat exhaustion.



Heat exhaustion

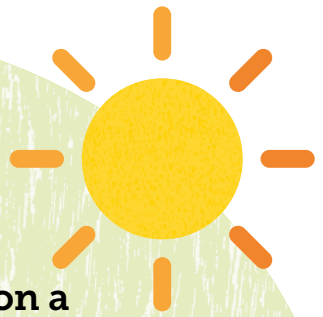
Heat exhaustion is where you become very hot and start to lose water or salt from your body.

Symptoms can include:

- loss of appetite and feeling sick
- a headache
- dizziness and confusion
- sweating heavily and pale, clammy skin
- intense thirst
- cramps in your arms, legs and stomach
- fast breathing or pulse
- a temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) or above.

If you have these symptoms, you should go to a cool place, lie down with your feet slightly raised, drink plenty of water and remove any extra layers of clothes. You can also try to cool your skin, for example using wet flannels. You should start to cool down and feel better within 30 minutes.

If you don't, call 999.



“ When playing cricket on a very hot day, I was keeping wicket and hadn't had enough water. I suddenly found that my vision was blurring and had to be helped from the field, laid down in a darkened room and had copious amounts of cold water poured into and on me to cool down. After about half an hour I was fine and went back to the game but it's not an experience you want to go through. Thirst is not a good indicator. Always drink more water than you think you need. ”

Heat exhaustion isn't usually serious and often improves on its own. However, it can develop into heatstroke.

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is an emergency. Call 999 immediately if anyone shows these symptoms:

- severe headache
- a temperature of 40°C (104°F) or above
- feeling very sick and being sick
- rapid breathing or shortness of breath
- confusion
- very hot, flushed skin
- no sweating, despite being hot
- a fit or seizure
- loss of consciousness.

While waiting for the ambulance, move the person somewhere cool, give them water if they're conscious and shower their skin with cool water or cover them in damp towels. Put them in the recovery position if they lose consciousness.

Getting help

If you're worried about any health problems or you feel unwell, always contact your GP. You can also call NHS 111. They can take the details of your symptoms and advise on what to do next: whether to call 999 immediately, book an appointment with your GP or visit a pharmacist in your own time.

It's also a good idea to tell friends, family or a neighbour if you're feeling unwell. Try to stay in touch with people even if you can't go out much. And keep an eye on friends, relatives or neighbours who may be less able to look after themselves.

Our free advice guides

You may be interested in...



Living well with long-term health conditions

Living well and managing your condition.



Getting help at home

How to find help to stay independent in your own home.



Caring for someone

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The information in this guide applies to England only.

If you're in Wales, contact Age Cymru (0800 022 3444, ageuk.org.uk/cymru) for information and advice.

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland (0800 12 44 222, ageuk.org.uk/scotland)

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI (0808 808 7575, ageuk.org.uk/northern-ireland)

We want the UK to be the best place to grow older and we have ambitious targets to increase the number of older people we help and the difference we make. We receive no state funding and rely on income from individuals, trusts and other sources to continue providing our services to hundreds of thousands of older people in need.

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A charity founded over 150 years ago, we're independent so you can be.

For more information, visit our website **independentage.org**

Call us for information or to arrange free, impartial advice from an adviser. Lines are open 8.30am–6.30pm Monday to Friday and 9am–1pm Saturday. Freephone **0800 319 6789** or email **advice@independentage.org**



advice and support for older age

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