

# Keep cool this summer: Tips to avoid heat stress

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Most of us look forward to the warmer weather and feeling some sun on our faces. However, exposure to even moderate heat can result in heat stress and heat-related illnesses. Importantly, heat-related illness can be prevented.

## Heat stress

Heat stress occurs when our body is unable to cool itself enough to maintain a healthy temperature. The body cools itself by sweating, but sometimes sweating isn't enough to keep the body's temperature from rising.

## Heat related illness

Heat-related illness can range from mild conditions, such as a rash or cramps, to very serious conditions such as heat exhaustion, heatstroke, and even heat-related death.

## Who is at risk?

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Extreme heat can affect anybody. Warm to very hot weather or long periods of exceptionally high day and night-time temperatures (heatwaves) increases the risk of heat illness

Those most at risk are young children, older people, and people with medical condition.



# Preventing heat stress

Take steps to prevent heat stress on days when the temperature is predicted to rise above 30°C.



**Stay  
Cool**



**Stay  
Hydrated**



**Stay  
Informed**



## Stay Cool

### Plan ahead to avoid exposure to heat

Too much activity on a hot day can lead to heat stress. If you can, restrict activity to cooler parts of the day (usually before 11 am and after 3 pm).

Limit your use of the stove or oven to cook—it will make you and your house hotter.

Walk in the cool of the morning. Avoid physical activities like sport, renovating and gardening in extreme heat and/or if there is smoke haze.

Never stay or leave others in a parked car. Cars can heat up to dangerous temperatures very quickly.

Don't stand outside in the heat waiting for a bus.

Avoid crowded places when it's hot outside. Plan trips during quieter times.

### Keep yourself cool

Use a spray bottle to keep cool by misting.

Take tepid showers or baths to cool down.

Keep up your energy levels by eating smaller meals more often and cold meals such as salads.

Stay out of the sun as much as you can.

If you must be outdoors, remember to protect yourself from the sun. Use sunscreen and wear a hat and sunglasses. If possible, wear natural fabrics such as cotton or bamboo.

If you have to walk somewhere, completely soak a hat with tap water beforehand and periodically press the brim to your forehead. Carrying a bottle of water to pour on yourself can also help.

### Keep your home cool

Keep your shades, blinds or curtains closed during the hottest part of the day.

Open your windows at night or the early morning.

Keep air moving around you. Turn on your air conditioner and set it to 'cool'.

If you do not have an air conditioner, drape wet face washers and tea towels on your head, arms and neck. Hang wet hessian bags, sheets or towels on screen doors or opened windows, or in front of a fan.

Sit in front of or under an electric fan. Put a shallow bowl or pan of ice-cold water in front of a portable fan.

If your house is hot, try to spend time in a place that has air conditioning such as the library, a friend's house, a shopping centre or the movies. Your local government may have designated 'cool relief' centres.

If you need help getting to a cool place, ask a friend or relative. Some religious groups, community organisations or your local government provide this service. If necessary, take a taxi or organise community transport.

**If there is smoke haze**, you may need to shut windows and doors. Avoid using an evaporative air conditioner (or any air conditioner that draws air in from outside)—only use air conditioners that circulate indoor air such as refrigerated cooling.

# Preventing heat stress

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## Stay Hydrated

### Drink regularly

Drink cool water regularly throughout the day. Aim to drink 6–8 glasses of liquid a day, and more if it's hot. Diluted fruit juice or vegetable juices are good choices.

If you are experiencing dehydration, consider drinking an oral rehydration solution if you have one.

### Drinks to avoid

Avoid alcoholic, hot or sugary drinks (including tea and coffee) in hot weather.

If your doctor has told you to limit your liquids, ask what you should do when it is very hot.

Eat a balanced diet to help your body replace any salt you lose by sweating.



## Stay Informed

### Pay attention to weather reports

Keep up to date with weather forecasts and warnings. If you have a smartphone, you can download the **VicEmergency app**, which can alert you when the weather is going to be particularly hot.

If the temperature or humidity is going up, or an air pollution alert is in effect, you are at increased risk for a heat-related illness. Play it safe by checking the weather report before going outside.

### Pay attention to heat health alerts

**Heat health alerts** are issued by the Victorian Department of Health when temperatures are predicted to be high. You can **subscribe** to heat health alerts to receive automatic alerts when temperature thresholds are reached.

### Review medications with your doctor or pharmacist

If you take medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are at increased risk of heat stress in hot weather. Your doctor may advise that you avoid certain medications or adjust the dosage during the summer months.

### Pay attention to your body

Take note of the colour of your urine—brown or dark yellow urine suggests dehydration, and you will need to drink more water.

Be aware of any muscle cramps in your arms, legs or stomach, mild confusion, weakness or sleep problems. If you have any of these, rest in a cool place and drink plenty of fluids. Seek medical advice if your symptoms persist or worsen.

# Advice for carers, family members and neighbours

During hot weather, make daily or twice-daily visits to older relatives and neighbours. Remind them to drink lots of water or diluted juice (as long as their doctor hasn't recommended otherwise because of a pre-existing condition).

If there is a heatwave, offer to help them go somewhere cool such as air-conditioned libraries, or senior centres.

Make sure their home has adequate airflow.

## Ask yourself these questions:

**Are they drinking enough water?**

**Do they have access to air conditioning?**

**Do they know how to keep cool?**

**Do they show any signs of heat stress?**

## First aid for heat stress

If your relative or friend seems to be suffering from heat stress, cool them down promptly. Use whatever means is on hand; for example, sponge and fan the person, get them into a cool shower or wet them with a garden hose. Seek immediate medical help.

## Where to get help



In an emergency, call Triple Zero (000)



**Department of Health - 'Survive the Heat' resource in community languages**



Your doctor—if you, or someone you know, may be suffering from a heat-related illness



**St John Ambulance Australia**—for information and resources on first aid



**NURSE-ON-CALL is a Victorian helpline. Call 1300 60 60 24** for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days). **Other states** have a similar helpline.