

How to protect people from heat stress

Some people with disability are prone to heat stress on hot days.

What does heat stress look like?

People with heat stress can have:

- hot, dry skin
- profuse sweating
- a very high body temperature.
- dizziness, confusion or disorientation.

Preventing heat stress

Check the labels on the medication the person is taking

- Do the side effects include:
 - dysphagia (difficulty swallowing)
 - not being able to sweat as easily
 - not being aware of thirst
 - dehydration due to not enough water in the body and not drinking enough
 - not being aware of heat on hot days
 - drowsiness (feeling tired) or low blood pressure?
- Does the person have any of these side effects?
- If they do, help them to check with the doctor if there is other medication they can take that does not have that side effect.

Watch out for dehydration

Dehydration happens when people do not have enough fluids in their body. Someone is dehydrated when:

- their urine is dark yellow or brown – **if their urine is brown, ring emergency services on 000 immediately as this means the person is severely dehydrated**
- they are not urinating or only passing a little bit of urine
- they are more tired than normal
- they have a dry mouth and lips.

If someone is dehydrated, and at all times on a hot day:

- encourage the person to drink more water or other liquids – ensure you have lots of water or their favourite drinks available
- make sure they can always reach water or other liquids
- encourage them to eat food they like that has a lot of liquid in it like soup, jelly, yoghurt, ice-cream, fruit, salads, cold meats, fish and smoothies.

How to protect people from heat stress

Plan ahead in your home

- Ensure all air conditioners and fans are working.
- Think about installing more blinds on windows.
- Plan to go somewhere cooler such as an air-conditioned shopping centre if there is a power or equipment failure.

Plan ahead for outdoor activities

- Have food and drinks the person likes in an esky or cooler bag.
- Provide food with a lot of liquid in it – see 'Watch out for dehydration' section.
- Sit or stay in areas with shade.
- Go out at the cooler times of day.

Use sun protection when outside

- Ensure everyone uses sunscreen, wears a hat and sunglasses, avoids dark-coloured clothes and covers their arms and legs if possible.

Be aware of heat stroke

In extreme cases, people can suffer from heat stroke. Symptoms include slurred speech, confusion, seizures and loss of consciousness.

If you are worried a person is experiencing heat stroke, ring 000 at once and ask for an ambulance.

Who is more at risk of heat stress?

People more at risk of heat-related illness include those:

- taking more than one medication
- with epilepsy or other neurological disorders
- with cerebral palsy or other motor disorders
- with dementia or other intellectual disabilities
- who are obese or unfit, or have diabetes or high blood pressure
- taking medications that increase the body's sensitivity to the sun's ultraviolet rays such as antipsychotics, antidepressants, anticonvulsants, antihistamines, diuretics, NSAIDs, statins and diabetes medications
- taking medications with certain side effects (see 'Preventing heat stress' section).

Who can help and support you?

- The support worker can give information and seek further advice from a health professional on your behalf, such as a nurse, doctor or pharmacist.
- Your doctor can review medication and maybe prescribe a medicine that does not make people more prone to heat stress.