



MIND THE WEATHER

Managing your health and wellbeing during hot weather

During hot weather, it is easy for your body to become dehydrated or overheat. It is very important to be mindful of this to avoid heat illnesses like heat cramps, heat exhaustion or heatstroke.

Heat illness covers a range of medical conditions that can happen when the body is unable to cope with the heat. They can be very serious if not treated and can result in permanent damage to vital organs or even death.

Are you at risk?

Those most vulnerable to experiencing heat illness include:

- Older people (65 years and older)
- People taking certain medications, such as those for depression or insomnia
- People with a physical disability
- People with a mental health condition
- People living alone with little social contact
- People with a pre-existing physical health condition, such as diabetes, heart disease or kidney disease
- Babies and young children
- Pregnant women
- People who are homeless
- Some people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who cannot access health services or information

Why the risk?

Combinations of medical conditions during extreme heat events can make it hard to:

- Recognise when you're becoming affected by extreme heat
- Reduce your body heat through sweating
- Maintain healthy body fluid levels and hydration

Heat illness symptoms

Signs and symptoms of heat illness include:

- Hot and dry skin
- Paleness
- Rapid heart rate
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Lack of sweating despite the heat
- Dizziness or weakness
- Worsening of pre-existing medical conditions

Some medications increase the risk of heat stress, such as antidepressants, heart tablets, fluid tablets and sedatives. If you are unsure of the possible interactions between your medication and heat, speak to your doctor.

How to be prepared

There are a number of things that you can do to avoid the risk of heat illness, including:

- Drinking plenty of water (2-3 litres during hot weather. If you are on fluid tablets, discuss water intake with your doctor first)
- Limiting or avoiding alcohol and caffeine
- Modifying physical activity (e.g. exercise in the morning or night when it is cooler)
- Staying indoors, if possible in air-conditioning (shopping centres are air-conditioned)
- Taking a cool shower or bath
- Fanning air and applying a wet towel on skin
- Wearing lightweight, loose-fitting clothing
- Applying sunscreen at regular intervals while outdoors
- Staying in shaded areas when outdoors if possible
- Blocking out the sun at home during the day by closing curtains and blinds
- Checking how to correctly store your medication
- If you have insulin, do not leave it in direct sunlight or in a hot car. Keep it in a cooler, but do not place it directly on ice or a gel pack
- If you live in an at-risk area, you may like to contact your local council and ask to be placed on the Vulnerable Persons Register
- Talk to your Neami Support Worker about any concerns you may have or to develop a plan in case of extreme heat events

In an emergency

If the symptoms of heat illness do not go away or if you feel worse, contact your local doctor, go to the Emergency Department of your nearest hospital or call the ambulance on 000.

People living with mental illness, particularly those taking medications for mental illness, are among the groups at most risk of heat illness and may not be aware of or be able to recognise the signs and symptoms.

More information

For more information contact your Neami worker.

References

- The Department of Health (Victoria)
www.health.vic.gov.au
- SA Health
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au
- Government of Western Australia - Department of Health
www.health.wa.gov.au/home
- The Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- The Victorian WorkCover Authority
www.vwa.vic.gov.au