

Heatwave: how to cope in hot weather

Most of us welcome hot weather and the summer sun, but when it's too hot for too long, there are health risks. Make sure the hot weather does not harm you or anyone you know. High temperatures can be harmful to your health. The heat can affect anyone, but some people run a greater risk of serious harm.

The main risks posed by a heatwave are:

- not drinking enough water ([dehydration](#)) and [Find out how to spot dehydration](#)
- overheating, which can make symptoms worse for people who already have problems with their heart or breathing
- [heat exhaustion and heatstroke](#)

Who's most at risk

A heatwave can affect anyone, but there are certain factors which can increase an individual's risk during a heatwave. Remember to think of those who may be more at risk from the effect of heat, these include:

- older people – especially those over 75
- those who live on their own, in a care home or are socially isolated
- people who on multiple medications, have a serious or long term illness – including heart or lung conditions, [diabetes](#), [kidney disease](#), [Parkinson's disease](#) or some mental health conditions
- those who may find it hard to keep cool – babies and the very young, the bed bound, those with drug or alcohol addictions or with [Alzheimer's disease](#)
- people with reduced mobility and/or the ability to look after themselves
- people who are physically active (for example, soldiers, athletes, hikers and manual workers) activities or jobs that are in hot places or outdoors and include high levels of physical exertion

You should take extra care in the sun if you:

- have pale, white or light brown skin
- have freckles or red or fair hair
- tend to burn rather than tan
- have many moles
- have skin problems relating to a medical condition
- are only exposed to intense sun occasionally
- have a family history of skin cancer

Tips for coping in hot weather

- Try to keep out of the sun when the sun is strongest between 11am and 3pm
- Stay cool indoors, out of the heat, cool yourself down, keep your environment cool or find somewhere that is cool
- If going outdoors spend time or try to walk in the shade,
- Liberally apply and frequently use (ideally every 2 hours) use sunscreen (at least sun protection factor 30) to all exposed skin, including the face, neck and ears, and head if you have thinning or no hair.
- If you plan to be out in the sun long enough to risk burning, sunscreen needs to be applied twice: 30 minutes before going out and just before going out.
- Reapplications of sunscreen are also needed straight after you have been in water, towel drying, sweating or when it may have rubbed off.
- Cover up with light coloured, loose long clothing, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, if you have to go out in the heat
- Avoid exercising in the hottest parts of the day
- Make sure you take water with you, if you are travelling
- Drink plenty of fluids/cold drinks, especially when exercising
- Avoid excess alcohol
- Take cool baths or showers
- Close curtains on rooms that face the sun to keep indoor spaces cooler and remember it may be cooler outdoors than indoors
- Never leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle, especially infants, young children or animals
- Get medical advice if you are suffering from a chronic medical condition or taking multiple medications

Links to general heatwave advice

[Heatwave: how to cope in hot weather - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

[Beat the heat: staying safe in hot weather - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

[Heatwave Plan for England: Protecting health and reducing harm from severe heat and heatwaves](#)

Protecting vulnerable family members and friends such as the elderly and babies

Severe heat is dangerous to everyone, especially older and disabled people, and those living in care homes. During a heatwave, when temperatures remain abnormally high for longer than a couple of days, it can prove fatal. There is a risk of development of heat exhaustion, heatstroke and other heat-related illnesses including respiratory and heart problems.

[Government advice for care home managers and staff to support vulnerable people before and during a heatwave](#)

[Government advice supporting vulnerable people before and during a heatwave: for health and social care professionals](#)

Children's susceptibility to high temperatures varies; those under 4 years of age, who are overweight, or who are taking certain medication may be at increased risk of adverse effects. Some children with disabilities or complex health needs may be more susceptible to high temperatures.

Take extra care to protect babies and children. Their skin is much more sensitive than adult skin, and damage caused by repeated exposure to sunlight could lead to skin cancer developing in later life.

Children aged under 6 months should be kept out of direct strong sunlight. [Government advice for looking after children and those in early years settings during heatwaves: for teachers and professionals](#)

If you or someone else feels unwell with a high temperature during hot weather, it may be heat exhaustion or heatstroke. [Find out about the signs of heat related illness, exhaustion and heatstroke, and when to get help](#)

[Get tips on preventing and treating heat exhaustion in hot weather](#)

How to deal with sunburn

Sponge sore skin with cool water, then apply soothing after sun cream or spray, like aloe vera.

Painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, will ease the pain by helping to reduce inflammation caused by sunburn.

Stay out of the sun until all signs of redness have gone.

[Find out more about treating sunburn](#)

Seek medical help if you feel unwell or the skin swells badly or blisters. Stay out of the sun until all signs of redness have gone.

Stay safe when swimming

During warm weather cooling off in swimming pools or bodies of water such as rivers, lakes or quarries can provide much welcomed relief. While this can be a fun activity on warm days, people who do not take the right precautions may find themselves in difficult situations.

Please take care and observe the following guidance:

- always look for warning and guidance signs
- only enter the water in areas with adequate supervision and rescue cover
- water is colder than it looks. Cold water shock can happen when you suddenly enter cold water, like jumping or falling into a river
- never enter the water after consuming alcohol
- get out of the water as soon as you start to feel cold or unwell
- always take someone with you when you go into or near water. If something goes wrong they will be able to get help *if someone is in difficulty in the water shout reassurance to them, shout for help and call the emergency services (call 999 or 112)