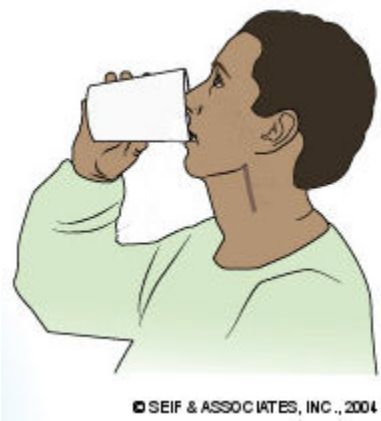
Heat Stress in the Elderly

Elderly people (people aged 65 years and older) are more prone to heat stress than younger people for several reasons:

- Elderly people do not adjust as well as young people to sudden changes in temperature.
- They are more likely to have a chronic medical condition that upsets normal body responses to heat.
- They are more likely to take prescription medicines that impair the body's ability to regulate its temperature or that inhibit perspiration.



HEAT STROKE

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. The body temperature rises rapidly. Then the body loses its ability to sweat and is unable to cool down. The body temperature rises to 105 ° F (40.6 °C) or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

SYMPTOMS

Warning signs vary but may include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F (39.4 ° C)).
- Nausea.
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating).
- Rapid, strong pulse.
- Throbbing headache.
- Dizziness.

HEAT EXHAUSTION

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness. It can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and not enough fluids.

SYMPTOMS

Warning signs vary but may include the following:

- Heavy sweating. Paleness.
- Muscle cramps.
- Tiredness. Weakness.
- Dizziness.
- Headache. Nausea or vomiting.
- Fainting.
- Skin: may be cool and moist.
- Pulse rate: fast and weak.
- Breathing: fast and shallow.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF

You can follow these prevention tips to protect yourself from heat-related stress:

- Drink cool, nonalcoholic, non-caffeinated beverages. If your caregiver generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask how much you should drink when the weather is hot. Avoid extremely cold liquids. They can cause cramps.
- Rest.
- Take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath.

- If possible, seek an air-conditioned environment. If you do not have air conditioning, visit an air-conditioned shopping mall or public library to cool off.
- Wear lightweight clothing.
- If possible, remain indoors in the heat of the day.
- Do not engage in strenuous activities.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP PROTECT ELDERLY RELATIVES AND NEIGHBORS

If you have elderly relatives or neighbors, help them protect themselves from heat-related stress.

- Visit older adults at risk at least twice a day. Watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Take them to air-conditioned locations if they have transportation problems.
- Make sure older adults have access to an electric fan whenever possible.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR SOMEONE WITH HEAT STRESS

- If you see any signs of severe heat stress, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the affected person. Do the following:
- Get the person to a shady area.
- Cool the person rapidly, using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water or place the person in a cool shower. Spray the person with cool water from a garden hose or sponge the person with cool water. If the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet. Fan him/her quickly.
- Monitor body temperature. Continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101° - 102°F (38.3 ° C - 38.9 ° C).
- If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.
- Do not give the person alcohol to drink.
- Get medical care as soon as possible.

This information is courtesy of the Department of Health and Human Services and the CDC.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov

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