

Summer heat hits elderly hardest

Coping with the heat of summer becomes more difficult as you grow older and the body's cooling mechanisms function less efficiently. Each year up to 1,000 Americans die from heat stroke and related complications, but such deaths are almost entirely preventable.

Fortunately, your body has a marvelous thermostat to prevent dramatic increases in temperature. To do this, it uses three primary mechanisms to lower body temperature: alterations in blood flow, perspiration and thirst.

When the brain perceives that body temperature is rising, it stimulates nerves in the skin and blood vessels, diverting blood to the surface of the body where it is more easily cooled. This is the reason why you appear flushed when you are hot.

Glands in the skin activate perspiration, which cools the body

when sweat evaporates off it. However, with high humidity, very little sweat is actually absorbed by the moisture-laden air, and the sweat merely rolls off the body. As a result, body temperature tends to increase abruptly.

With increasing age, thirst becomes a less reliable indicator of fluid needs, and your ability to sweat declines. Also, numerous medications can impair your capacity to regulate or maintain body temperature. Such medications may include antihistamines, heart and blood pressure drugs.

To dissipate heat, your body needs to perspire more and move blood closer to the skin's surface. Both of these responses, however, place extra demands on the heart, which then must beat faster.

The increased work load, if sustained, may cause symptoms in those with heart disease. Persons with diabetes and vascular disease are also at increased risk for heat-related problems.

Several suggestions are offered to help reduce heat stress when working or exercising in hot and/or humid environments:

- Avoid exertion in the sun, es-

		AIR TEMPERATURE (°F)											
RELATIVE HUMIDITY		70°	75°	80°	85°	90°	95°	100°	105°	110°	115°	120°	
		30%	67	73	78	84	90	96	104				
40%		68	74	79	86	93	101						
50%		69	75	81	88	95	103						
60%		70	76	82	90	98	106						
70%		70	77	83	91	99	107						
80%		71	78	85	93	101	109						
90%		71	79	86	94	102	110						
100%		72	80	88	96	104	112						

Heat index: The heat stress index chart for a range of temperatures and humidity levels. For example, if you go walking when the air temperature is 95 degrees, with humidity at 70 percent, it is equivalent to exercising at 124 degrees F. Shaded areas indicate conditions where exertion may be dangerous.

pecially during the day's hottest hours.

- Drink plenty of cool fluids throughout the day. Some researchers suggest that in hot weather you should drink 50 percent more than the amount it takes to quench your thirst. A rule of thumb: Drink at least a gallon of liquid a day if you are mostly outside and the temperature is above 90 degrees.
- Stay in air-conditioned facilities or use fans as much as possible.
- Avoid alcohol — it acts as a diuretic, depleting the body of precious fluids.

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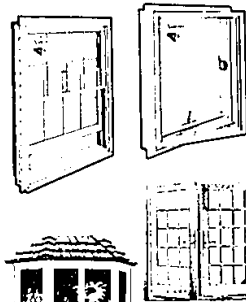
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