

The summertime is a time of fun and relaxation for most people. But for seniors, the heat and sun can be dangerous if the proper precautions aren't taken. Here are some great tips that the elderly, as well as their caregivers, can use to make sure they have a fun, safe summer.

### 1. **Stay Hydrated**

Seniors are more susceptible to dehydration than younger people because they lose their ability to conserve water as they age. They also can become less aware of their thirst and have difficulty adjusting to temperature changes. Remember to drink water often, and be sure to pack some for those long summer drives.

### 2. **Talk to Your Doctor**

Check with your medical team to make sure any medications you are on won't be affected by higher temperatures -- especially if you don't have air conditioning in your home. Some medications are less effective if stored at temperatures higher than room temperature (approximately 78 degrees Fahrenheit), and the last thing anyone wants is for a preventable medical condition to become aggravated due to high temperatures.

### 3. **Keep Your Cool**

Even small increases in temperature can shorten the life expectancy for seniors who are coping with chronic medical conditions. Shopping malls, movie theaters and libraries provide welcome, cool spaces if a senior's own home isn't air conditioned. They also afford a great opportunity to get out of the house and get some exercise, without the exhaustion of the heat.

### 4. **Stay in Touch**

High temperatures can be life-threatening, so communication plays an important role in ensuring the safety of the elderly. For seniors, you should let friends and family know if you'll be spending an extended period of time outdoors, even if you're only gardening. **Meet Your Neighbors** Get in touch with those who live in your neighborhood and learn a bit about them and their schedules. If you are elderly, see if a younger neighbor -- perhaps even one of their kids -- can come by and check on you occasionally to make sure everything is all right. The extra company and friendship that can result is a bonus!

### 5. **Know Who to Call**

Prepare a list of emergency phone numbers and place them in an easy to access area. This way, the right people can be called to help quickly preventing any further issues or preventing medical problems from getting worse.

## 6. **Right Stuff**

Everyone, including seniors, should dress for the weather. When it's warm out, some people find natural fabrics (such as cotton) to be cooler than synthetic fibers. Stock your summer wardrobe with light-colored and loose-fitting clothes to help feel cooler and more comfortable.

## 7. **Protect Your Eyes**

Vision loss can be common among the elderly, and too much exposure to the sun can irritate eyes and cause further damage. Wearing sunglasses can protect your eyes from harmful UV rays and preserve your vision.

## 8. **Know the Risks of Hyperthermia**

During the summer, be particularly cautious about abnormally high body temperatures -- a condition known as hyperthermia. Heat stroke is an advanced form of hyperthermia that can be life-threatening. Make sure to know the warning signs and get medical attention immediately if you or anyone you know is experiencing these symptoms:

- Body temperature greater than 104 degrees
- A change in behavior, such as acting confused, agitated or grouchy
- Dry, flushed skin
- Nausea and vomiting
- Headache
- Heavy breathing or a rapid pulse
- Not sweating, even if it's hot out
- Fainting

## 9. **Rub on Sunscreen and Wear Hats**

Everyone, young and old, should wear sunscreen when outdoors. The elderly especially need the extra sun protection to help keep them healthy. Caregivers, family and friends can help by gently reminding loved ones about applying sunscreen and helping to put it on when necessary. Hats are also a great idea, especially for those with light colored hair and those with only distant memories of a full head of hair.

## 10. **Apply Bug Spray**

The elderly is particularly prone to West Nile Virus and encephalitis. If you live in areas where there are a lot of mosquitoes and where West Nile Virus is present, and if you spend a lot of time outdoors (particularly at night), use mosquito repellent to help reduce the risk of getting bit by a mosquito carrying this virus.

Stay safe this Summer.

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