

# Staying cool in a heatwave

Tips to keep you cool  
when it's very hot

Health &  
wellbeing



# *We are Age UK.*

*Our network includes Age Cymru,  
Age NI, Age Scotland, Age International  
and more than 160 local partners.*

This information leaflet has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, which we hope will be of use to you. Nothing in this leaflet should be construed as the giving of specific advice and it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action and is in no way intended as a substitute for professional medical advice specific to any individual case. Neither Age UK nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts any liability arising from its use. We aim to ensure that the information is as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that certain areas are subject to change from time to time. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information leaflet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this leaflet is correct. However, things do change, so it is always a good idea to seek expert advice on your personal situation.

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# Introduction

We all look forward to ‘a good summer’, even though we’re quite often disappointed! But very high temperatures and humidity can present a risk to health, and older people can be particularly susceptible to heat-related illness. It’s important not to get caught out during unseasonably warm weather too. Temperatures can soar as early as April.

Inside, you’ll find a few helpful tips on how to protect yourself from the heat, how to recognise heat-related illness, and what to do if someone shows signs of it.

Throughout this leaflet you will find suggestions for organisations that can offer further information and advice about your options. Their contact details can be found in the ‘Useful organisations’ section (see pages 12–13). Contact details for organisations near you can usually be found in your local phone book. If you have difficulty finding them, your local Age UK should be able to help (see page 12).

As far as possible, the information given in this leaflet is applicable across the UK.

## Key

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This symbol indicates where information differs for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



This symbol indicates who to contact for the next steps you need to take.

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# Avoiding heat-related illness


- Keep out of the heat. Don't spend long periods sitting or working outside during the hottest time of the day: late morning to mid-afternoon. If you do go out, wear a hat and stay in the shade as much as possible.
- If you're travelling by car or public transport always take a bottle of water.
- Avoid strenuous activity, and limit activities like housework and gardening to the early morning or evening when it's cooler.
- When inside, try to stay in the coolest parts of your home. Keep curtains and blinds closed in rooms that catch the sun. Remember that lights generate heat. Keep windows shut while it's cooler inside than out and open them when it gets hotter inside. If it's safe, you could leave a window open at night when it's cooler. Fans can help sweat evaporate but do not cool the air itself.
- Wear loose, lightweight, light-coloured, cotton clothing.
- Take cool baths or showers.
- Splash your face with cool (not very cold) water, or place a damp cloth or scarf on the back of your neck to help you cool off.
- Drink lots of fluid – even if you aren't thirsty. If you usually rely on drinks with caffeine in them, such as tea, coffee or cola, limit these and have water first or instead. Avoid alcohol as it can make dehydration worse.
- Eat normally – even if you aren't hungry, you need a normal diet to replace salt losses from sweating. In addition, try to have more cold foods, particularly salads and fruit, as these contain a lot of water.

# Looking after your skin

It's very important to ensure that your skin isn't exposed to the sun for long periods, as this can lead to sunburn and make you more susceptible to skin cancer. Whenever you go out in the sun, use sunscreen of at least sun protection factor (SPF) 15 with four or five stars, applying it generously and topping up regularly if you're going to be outside for a while. The sunscreen's star rating shows its ability to protect your skin from damage and premature ageing.

Get to know your skin type – whether you burn easily can influence the strength of sunscreen you should use and how long you can be outside in the sun without burning.

But remember that anyone can develop skin cancer, so it's important to protect your skin whatever your skin type. When you're using sunscreen, remember to apply it to your ears if they're exposed, as well as your arms, any bald patches on your head, and any other uncovered part of your body. A hat will protect your head, face, ears and eyes. Choose sunglasses that have a CE mark, UV400 label or a statement that they offer 100 per cent UV (ultraviolet) protection. When the weather is hot, your skin may also feel drier than usual. Using moisturiser can help keep your skin healthy.

-  In Wales, you can get a free UV Safe card from NHS Direct Wales. These wallet-sized cards show the level of sun exposure to warn against harmful UV rays. Call NHS Direct Wales (see page 13) or email [ppi.team@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:ppi.team@wales.nhs.uk) to get one.

# Sun exposure and vitamin D

Although it's essential to protect your skin, some direct exposure to the sun is important for the production of vitamin D, so don't avoid the sun altogether. Don't let your skin redden or burn, but try to go outside every day without sunscreen for around 10 minutes from May to September. Try to do this either once or twice a day. The more of your skin that is exposed, the better your chance of making enough vitamin D.

There are some food sources of vitamin D – salmon, sardines and other oily fish, eggs and fortified spreads – but sunshine is the major source for most people. The Government recommends vitamin D supplements for some groups of the population, including people aged 65 and over. If you think you could be at risk of not getting enough vitamin D, particularly if you are housebound or cover your skin for cultural reasons, raise this with your GP. Always speak to your GP before starting to take a vitamin supplement or over-the-counter medicine on a daily basis.

## what next?

If you have moles or brown patches on your skin, they usually remain harmless. However, if they bleed, or change size, shape or colour, show them to your GP without delay. For more information on checking moles, visit the Cancer Research UK SunSmart website at [www.sunsmart.org.uk](http://www.sunsmart.org.uk)

## Dehydration and overheating

Extreme heat and dry conditions can cause you to dehydrate and your body to overheat. It's important to make sure you eat a balanced diet to help your body replace any salt you lose by sweating. You may also need to take particular care if you're taking some types of medication that affect water retention. Talk to your GP if you are concerned.

Watch out for certain signs – particularly for muscle cramps in your arms, legs or stomach, mild confusion, weakness or sleep problems. If you have any of these, rest in a cool place and drink plenty of fluids. Seek medical advice if your symptoms persist or worsen.

## Heat exhaustion and heatstroke

### Heat exhaustion

The symptoms of heat exhaustion include headaches, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, pale skin, heavy sweating and a raised temperature.

If you have any of these symptoms you must, if at all possible:

- find a cool place and loosen tight clothes
- drink plenty of water or fruit juice
- sponge yourself with cool water or have a cool shower.

### what next?

If you're having difficulty, or your symptoms persist for several hours, call your GP or NHS 111 for advice (see page 13). In Wales contact NHS Direct Wales (see page 13); in Scotland contact NHS 24 (see page 13); and in Northern Ireland visit [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)





## Heatstroke

Heatstroke can develop if heat exhaustion is left untreated – but it can also develop suddenly and without warning.

The symptoms of heatstroke include hot and red skin, headaches, nausea, intense thirst, a high temperature, confusion, aggression and loss of consciousness.

### **Heatstroke is a life-threatening condition.**

#### **So if you or someone else shows symptoms:**

- call 999 immediately, or 112 if you are in the European Union (you can call 112 from a mobile for free); if you have a community alarm, press the button on your pendant to call for help
- while waiting for the ambulance, follow the advice given on page 6 for heat exhaustion, but do not try to give fluids to anyone who is unconscious.

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***‘I still enjoy the nice weather but I’m much more careful now. On hot days I only stay outside for a little while at a time.’***



**After Eva felt hot and dizzy in the garden one day, she started to take more care in the sun.**

‘I’d never really thought sitting out in the sun could be a problem, until I was out for too long on a very hot day. I started to feel a bit dizzy and I had a headache, so I went back indoors. Luckily my neighbour was with me as we’d been sitting in the garden together, so she got me a glass of water. After that I felt a lot better. My neighbour wondered if I’d been dehydrated.

‘A lot of people think it doesn’t get warm enough in this country for us to need to take care, so they only look after themselves when they’re on holiday. But wherever you are you can get ill if you have too much sun, and you need to be careful even when the sky looks hazy. I still enjoy the nice weather but I’m much more careful now. On hot days I only stay outside for a little while at a time, and if I don’t want to be cooped up indoors I just sit in the shade.’



## ***What else can you do?***

- If you live alone, consider asking a relative or friend to visit or phone to check that you're not having difficulties during periods of extreme heat.
- If you know a neighbour who lives alone, check regularly that they are OK.
- If a heatwave is on its way or the weather is hot for several days, listen to local radio so that you know the latest advice for your area. Check for weather forecasts and temperature warnings on TV and radio, and online at [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)
- If you have breathing problems or a heart condition, your symptoms might get worse when it's very hot. Contact your GP for advice.

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# Useful organisations

## Age UK

We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact

**Age Cymru:** 0800 169 65 65

[www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

In Northern Ireland, contact

**Age NI:** 0808 808 7575

[www.ageni.org](http://www.ageni.org)

In Scotland, contact

**Age Scotland:** 0845 125 9732

[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)

## Cancer Research UK SunSmart campaign

Information about skin cancer and sun protection.

[www.sunsmart.org.uk](http://www.sunsmart.org.uk)

## Met Office

Check your local weather forecast and get advice on managing in severe weather conditions.

[www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk)

## **NHS Choices**

Information on conditions, treatments, local services and healthy living.

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

In Wales, visit [www.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.wales.nhs.uk)

In Scotland, visit NHS Inform [www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)

Tel: 0800 22 44 88

In Northern Ireland visit NI Direct [www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk) and click on 'Health services' (listed under Health and wellbeing) to find health services in your area.

## **NHS 111 / NHS Direct**

NHS 24-hour helpline for advice on urgent but non-life-threatening symptoms, including those caused by heat-related illness. Calls to 111 are free from landlines and mobiles.

NHS 111 is replacing NHS Direct in England and will be available for most people from April 2013. If NHS 111 hasn't reached your area yet, call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

In Wales, contact **NHS Direct Wales**

Tel: 0845 46 47

[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

In Scotland, contact **NHS 24**

Call 08454 242424

[www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

# Can you help Age UK?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: RSXZ-KTTS-KSHT, Age UK, Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, LONDON WC1H 9NA. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 87 87 or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/donate](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/donate). If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

## Personal details

Title:	Initials:	Surname:
Address: _____ _____		
Postcode: _____		
Tel:	Email:	

By providing your email address and/or mobile number you are agreeing to us contacting you in these ways. You may contact us at any time to unsubscribe from our communications.

## Your gift

I would like to make a gift of: £

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Age UK

## Card payment

I wish to pay by (please tick)  MasterCard  Visa  CAF CharityCard  
 Maestro  American Express

(Maestro only)

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Signature <b>X</b>
Expiry date	<input type="text"/>	/	<input type="text"/>	Issue no. (Maestro only)	<input type="text"/>	

## Gift aid declaration

(please tick) Yes, I want Age UK and its partner organisations\* to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as gift aid donations. I confirm I pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity will reclaim on my donations in the tax year. Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ (please complete). \*Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI



We will use the information you have supplied to communicate with you according to data protection guidelines. Age UK (registered charity number 1128267) comprises the charity, its group of companies and national partners (Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI). If you would prefer not to hear from them or carefully selected third parties, let us know by phoning 0800 107 8977.



## You may be interested in other guides in this range

- Bereavement
- Caring for your eyes
- Going into hospital
- Going solo
- Health services
- Healthy eating
- Healthy living
- Managing incontinence
- Staying steady
- Winter wrapped up



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To order any of our **free** publications, please call Age UK Advice free on:

**0800 169 65 65**

[www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing)

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# What should I do now?

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For more information on the issues covered in this guide, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing)

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *Health services*
- *Healthy living*
- *Staying steady*

The Age UK Group offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.

