



10 ways for Seniors to beat the heat

SPECIAL TO THE BEACH NEWS

As the summer heats up, many Senior Citizens will begin to leave their homes to take advantage of the sun and warm weather. Although many would agree that "age is a state of mind," the summer months bring with them risks to susceptible elderly populations that

have been homebound during the winter months.

That's why Visiting Angels, the nation's leading at-home non-medical assisted living service provider, has created the following tips to help Seniors prepare for the sweltering conditions and the rigors of living through the upcoming heat

waves.

- **Keep household windows open.** The elderly tend to lose their sense of body temperature, which could lead to death from heat illnesses. According to the Center for Disease Control, during 1979-99, a total of 8,015 heat-related deaths occurred in this country. As people age, their brain sometimes can't recognize that the body is overheating. As a result, some Seniors keep windows closed or may wear sweaters on sweltering days because they feel cold. Be sure to open some windows throughout the house to circulate fresh air and maintain a safe temperature.

- **Stay cool inside cars.** When traveling in a car with Seniors, always maintain a suitable temperature during the trip. Leave windows open if they stay in the vehicle while you run into a store. Like very young members of the family, Seniors need fresh air, as they run a greater risk of overheating in a hot, closed automobile. And, of course, for safety, make sure all passengers use

their seat belts.

- **Minimize exposure to the sun.** Whether it is around the house, in the park or at the beach, Seniors need to limit direct exposure to the sun. Not only do they run a higher risk of skin disease, sunburn, or overheating, but also exhaustion, an often dangerous — and overlooked — hazard during the summer. Being overactive or simply sitting outside for too long puts the elderly at risk for serious conditions that may threaten their health. To minimize risks, wear light colored clothing and plan outdoor activities during the cooler parts of the day.

- **Drink plenty of fluids.** Staying hydrated is essential for everyone, but the elderly tend to lose fluids faster than other age groups. Given the threat of overheating and becoming physically strained, it is important that Seniors drink plenty of water and other liquids to get the nutrients they need to stay healthy.

- **Avoid stressful activities.** Even the most vivacious Seniors should be careful of how much energy they expend outdoors during the summer months. It can be difficult for the elderly to give up activities or responsibilities as they get older, so be sure that Seniors



are not over-extending themselves. Tasks, such as mowing lawns and gardening, should be saved for cooler days or passed on to landscaping companies.

- **Stay active, but cool.** Take part in activities that are enjoyable and appropriate for weather conditions, and emphasize socialization. Pool exercises are a perfect way for Seniors to stay fit, flexible and cool. Also, many community centers provide activities in air conditioned facilities for the elderly that focus on their interests, promote friendships, and allow trained staff to monitor conditions.

- **Understand how sun exposure can effect certain medications.** Some prescription medications can have negative side effects if the user has prolonged exposure to the sun or takes part in outdoor physical activi-

ties in very hot weather. Certain medications (such as anti-psychotics, tranquilizers, antidepressants, and over-the-counter sleeping pills) can impair the body's ability to regulate its temperature or inhibit perspiration under similar conditions. All of these risks are amplified when combined with alcoholic beverages. Seniors should always read the warning labels on medication and check with a physician or pharmacist to avoid harmful side effects.

- **Wear sunscreen and insect repellent.** The season's sun and bugs can be a challenge to summer comfort, so be prepared to prevent their sting. Keep bug spray and a high-SPF sunscreen on hand and apply the treatment regularly in accordance with the label instructions.

- **Establish a buddy system.** Create a set routine where a family member, a friend or a local volunteer checks on the elderly, on a daily basis, during a heat wave. This is especially important for Seniors who suffer from Alzheimer's or dementia. The elderly affected by dementia may be unable to communicate their discomfort or may become confused about their body temperature and require consistent monitoring. Capable Seniors should also be proactive and find someone to check on them to monitor their safety/health on a regular basis.

- **Know the warning signs of heat exhaustion.** Unusual fatigue, dizziness, nausea and headaches may be early signs of heat exhaustion. Keep an eye on neighbors and friends who may be prone to fatigue or dehydration to ensure their safety. Ignoring or not knowing the signs may lead to heat stroke and possible death. If you find that someone is exhibiting the signs, hydrate them, find them a cool place to rest, and consult a physician. Call 911 if the problem is serious or if it persists.

For more information about Visiting Angels, contact Matthew McLoughlin at Matt@GregoryFCA.com.

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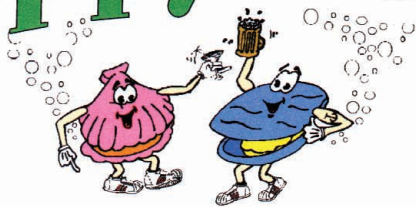
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