

# Heatwave: how to cope in hot weather



Credit:

**Most of us welcome hot weather, but when it's too hot for too long, there are health risks. In England, there are on average 2000 heat related deaths every year. If hot weather hits this summer, make sure it does not harm you or anyone you know.**

## Why is a heatwave a problem?

The main risks posed by a heatwave are:

- not drinking enough water ([dehydration](#))
- overheating, which can make symptoms worse for people who already have problems with their heart or breathing
- [heat exhaustion and heatstroke](#)

## Who's most at risk?

A heatwave can affect anyone, but the most vulnerable people are:

- older people – especially those over 75
- those who live on their own or in a care home
- people who have a serious or long term illness – including heart or lung conditions, [diabetes](#), [kidney disease](#), [Parkinson's disease](#) or some mental health conditions
- those who may find it hard to keep cool – babies and the very young, the bed bound, those with drug or alcohol addictions or with [Alzheimer's disease](#)

- people who spend a lot of time outside or in hot places – those who live in a top floor flat, the homeless or those whose jobs are outside

## Coronavirus

At the moment people are more at risk from heat related problems. Check on vulnerable people you know and get medical help if needed.

### Tips for coping in hot weather

- look out for those who may struggle to keep themselves cool and hydrated – older people, those with underlying health conditions and those who live alone are particularly at risk
- stay cool indoors – many of us will need to stay safe at home this summer so know how to keep your home cool
- close curtains on rooms that face the sun to keep indoor spaces cooler and remember it may be cooler outdoors than indoors
- if going outdoors, use cool spaces considerately, keep your distance in line with social distancing guidelines
- follow coronavirus social distancing guidance and wash your hands regularly
- drink plenty of fluids and avoid excess alcohol
- never leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle, especially infants, young children or animals
- try to keep out of the sun between 11am to 3pm
- walk in the shade, apply sunscreen regularly and wear a wide brimmed hat, if you have to go out in the heat
- avoid exercising in the hottest parts of the day
- make sure you take water with you, if you are travelling
- if you are going into open water to cool down, take care and follow local safety advice
- Remember that while coronavirus restrictions are in place, you will need to follow government guidance to use public spaces safely

For more information visit [GOV.UK: Heatwave Plan for England](#).

If you have concerns about an uncomfortably hot house that's affecting your health or someone else's, get medical advice.

You can also get help from the environmental health office at your local authority. They can inspect a home for hazards to health, including excess heat.

*Source: NHS website*

# Heat exhaustion and heatstroke

**Heat exhaustion is not usually serious if you can cool down within 30 minutes. If it turns into heatstroke, it needs to be treated as an emergency.**

## Check for signs of heat exhaustion

The signs of heat exhaustion include:

- a headache
- dizziness and confusion
- loss of appetite and feeling sick
- excessive sweating and pale, clammy skin
- cramps in the arms, legs and stomach
- fast breathing or pulse
- a high temperature of 38C or above
- being very thirsty

The symptoms are often the same in adults and children, although children may become floppy and sleepy.

If someone is showing signs of heat exhaustion, they need to be cooled down.

## Things you can do to cool someone down

If someone has heat exhaustion, follow these 4 steps:

1. Move them to a cool place.
2. Get them to lie down and raise their feet slightly.
3. Get them to drink plenty of water. Sports or rehydration drinks are OK.
4. Cool their skin – spray or sponge them with cool water and fan them. Cold packs around the armpits or neck are good, too.

Stay with them until they're better.

They should start to cool down and feel better within 30 minutes.

**Immediate action required: Call 999 if:**

**You or someone else have any signs of heatstroke:**

- feeling unwell after 30 minutes of resting in a cool place and drinking plenty of water

- not sweating even while feeling too hot
- a high temperature of 40C or above
- fast breathing or shortness of breath
- feeling confused
- a fit (seizure)
- loss of consciousness
- not responsive

Heatstroke can be very serious if not treated quickly.

Put the person in the recovery position if they lose consciousness while you're waiting for help.

## **Preventing heat exhaustion and heatstroke**

There's a high risk of heat exhaustion or heatstroke during hot weather or exercise.

To help prevent heat exhaustion or heatstroke:

- drink plenty of cold drinks, especially when exercising
- take cool baths or showers
- wear light-coloured, loose clothing
- sprinkle water over skin or clothes
- avoid the sun between 11am and 3pm
- avoid excess alcohol
- avoid extreme exercise

This will also prevent dehydration and help your body keep itself cool.

Keep an eye on children, the elderly and people with long-term health conditions (like diabetes or heart problems) because they're more at risk of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

# Dehydration

**Dehydration means your body loses more fluids than you take in. If it's not treated, it can get worse and become a serious problem.**

## Important

Babies, children and the elderly are more at risk of dehydration.

### Check if you're dehydrated

Symptoms of dehydration in adults and children include:

- feeling thirsty
- dark yellow and strong-smelling pee
- feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- feeling tired
- a dry mouth, lips and eyes
- peeing little, and fewer than 4 times a day

Dehydration can happen more easily if you have:

- [diabetes](#)
- vomiting or [diarrhoea](#)
- been in the sun too long ([heatstroke](#))
- drunk too much alcohol
- sweated too much after exercising
- a high temperature of 38C or more
- been taking medicines that make you pee more (diuretics)

### How you can reduce the risk of dehydration

Drink fluids when you feel any dehydration symptoms.

If you find it hard to drink because you feel sick or have been sick, start with small sips and then gradually drink more.

You can use a spoon to make it easier for your child to swallow the fluids.

You should drink enough during the day so your pee is a pale clear colour.

Drink when there's a higher risk of dehydrating. For example, if you're vomiting, sweating or you have diarrhoea.

## Video: how to prevent dehydration

This video shows you how you can reduce the risk of dehydration.

How to prevent dehydration.

Play Video

Media last reviewed: 1 July 2020

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## Carers: making sure someone drinks enough

Sometimes people you care for do not have a sense of how much they're drinking.

To help them:

- make sure they drink during mealtimes
- make drinking a social thing, like "having a cup of tea"
- offer them food with a high water content – for example, soups, ice cream or jellies, or fruits like melon

## A pharmacist can help with dehydration

If you're being sick or have diarrhoea and are losing too much fluid, you need to put back the sugar, salts and minerals that your body has lost.

Your pharmacist can recommend oral rehydration sachets. These are powders that you mix with water and then drink.

Ask your pharmacist which ones are right for you or your child.

### Find a pharmacy

**Non-urgent advice: See a GP if:**

- your symptoms do not improve with treatment

**Immediate action required: Call 999 or go to A&E if:**

- you're feeling unusually tired
- you're confused and disorientated
- any dizziness when you stand up does not go away
- you have not peed all day
- your pulse is weak or rapid
- you have fits (seizures)

These can be signs of serious dehydration that need urgent treatment.

## Under-5s with dehydration

The under-5s should get plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

It's quite common for young children to become dehydrated. It can be serious if it's not dealt with quickly.

**Urgent advice: Take your baby or child to the GP urgently or go to A&E if they:**

- seem drowsy
- breathe fast
- have few or no tears when they cry
- have a soft spot on their head that sinks inwards (sunken fontanelle)
- have a dry mouth
- have dark yellow pee or have not had a pee in last 12 hours
- have cold and blotchy-looking hands and feet

Once the dehydration has been treated, your child will need to maintain their fluid levels.

GPs usually advise:

### Do

- carry on breastfeeding or using formula – try to give small amounts more often than usual
- for babies on formula or solid foods – give them small sips of extra water
- give small children their usual diet
- give regular small sips of rehydration solution to replace lost fluids, salts and sugars – ask your pharmacist to recommend one

### Don't

- do not make formula weaker
- do not give young children fruit juice or fizzy drinks – it makes things like [diarrhoea](#) or vomiting worse