

# Older Adults are More Vulnerable to Heat Stress

Heat kills. Excessive heat is responsible for the most weather-related fatalities in the U.S. during an average year. Climate change makes it worse. Loss of trees contributes to greater heat and the urban heat island effect. Research has found that more than 80 percent of those dying from heat-related illnesses are over 60, and are among those immediately hardest hit by climate change. Older bodies don't regulate internal heat as well, and poor physical fitness or being overweight makes these problems worse. Some prescription medicines affect the body's ability to control its temperature or sweat. What can you do?

- \* **Check in:** the best defense against heat is social connection: family or neighbors checking on elders who are alone.
- \* **Drink plenty of cool water:** drink throughout the day (don't wait until you feel thirsty) and avoid alcohol and caffeine. If your doctor limits the amount of fluids you drink or has you on water pills, ask them how much you should drink during hot weather.
- \* **Eat light, cold meals:** try salads and sandwiches instead of heavy, hot dishes like pot roast. Don't use the stove or oven to cook—it will make you and your house hotter. Eat cooling snacks like homemade popsicles, frozen peas, or slightly frozen grapes.
- \* **Place a cool washcloth:** on the back of the neck and a pan of cool water close by to periodically re-cool the towel
- \* **Sit with feet in a pan of cool water:** (but not too cold)
- \* **Keep the house as cool:** as possible by keeping your shades closed during the hottest part of the day and using inexpensive Mylar solar curtains. Do not rely on a fan as your main cooling source when it's really hot outside. Go to an air conditioned site.
- \* **Stay in air conditioned buildings:** as much as possible. Visit a public cooling center like a recreation center, senior center, library, coffee shop, cinema, or shopping mall. AC can make you feel cooler even when you return to a non-AC home.
- \* **Wear layers of loose lightweight clothing:** in light colored cotton so it's easy to adjust to the temperature throughout the day by removing or adding layers.
- \* **Take a cool shower:** shower, bath, or washcloth wipe-down. For maximum cooling, keep the water just below body temperature.
- \* **Cover up with a flexible ice blanket:** – always use a towel to protect fragile senior skin from direct contact with the ice
- \* **Do not engage in very strenuous activities** and get plenty of rest.
- \* **Check the local news for health** and safety updates.
- \* **Seek medical care immediately:** if you have symptoms of heat-related illness like muscle cramps, headache, nausea, vomiting, temperature above 103, dizziness, fainting, rapid pulse, heavy sweating or no sweating.