

Extreme Heat

Important Phone Numbers



For more information

**Emergency Management Unit
Public Health and Clinical Systems
Department of Health**

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<http://www.gilf.gov.au/>

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Guide to coping and
staying healthy in the heat



During extremely hot weather, it is easy to become dehydrated or for your body to overheat. If this happens, you may develop heat cramps, heat exhaustion or even heatstroke (also called 'sunstroke').

Heatstroke is a medical emergency which can result in permanent damage to your vital organs, or even death, if not treated immediately.

South Australia can experience long periods of extreme heat so it is important to know what the effects of extreme heat are, who is at risk and how you can prepare for and cope during times of extreme heat.

This Guide provides:

- > information on heat related conditions and what to do if you have any symptoms of these
- > practical tips on preparing for and coping during extreme heat
- > emergency treatment to provide to a person affected by the heat while they wait for an ambulance
- > helpful tips for recovering from the heat when it is over.

Additional information

Fact sheets have been developed to provide specific information for coping during extreme heat. They relate to:

- > Preventing heat-related illness
- > Physical activity during the heat
- > Caring for babies and young children
- > Older children and teenagers
- > Caring for older people
- > Advice for older people
- > Pregnancy tips during the heat
- > People with physical and mental health conditions
- > Type of clothing to wear
- > Safe food handling
- > Caring for pets
- > Sleeping when it's hot

The fact sheets can be found on the SA Health website at:
www.health.sa.gov.au

Who is at risk during extreme heat?

Everyone is at risk during extremely hot weather but some people have a higher risk than others of becoming ill.

It is very important that those at higher risk take extra care of themselves during hot weather.

It is also important that family, friends, and neighbours of those at higher risk keep in contact with these people regularly to make sure they are coping with the extreme heat.

Those at higher risk are:

- > older people, particularly the frail or over 75
- > babies and young children
- > pregnant women
- > people who have difficulty keeping cool (e.g. with a physical disability)
- > a person with a high temperature from an existing infection
- > anyone who is confined to bed
- > people with dementia or Alzheimer's
- > people with a serious chronic condition (heart, breathing problems, diabetes, serious mental illness, or who are very overweight)
- > people taking certain types of medications, including those that affect sweating and body temperature
- > those who live on their own or who don't live close to other people
- > people who work outdoors, or who are physically active (gardeners or manual workers).



Heat Related Conditions

Condition	Symptoms	What you should do
Dehydration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Profuse sweating > Increase in body temperature > Lethargy and tiredness > Loss of appetite > Being thirsty > Irritability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Cease activity immediately if feeling unwell and go to a cool shaded place. > Drink plenty of fluids (avoid caffeine and alcohol). > Try to keep cool by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - turning on a fan or air-conditioner - using a spray bottle of water on the face and body. > If remaining unwell, seek medical advice as soon as possible.
Heat Cramps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Muscle spasms > Painful muscle cramps in the limbs or abdomen > Twitching > Moist cool skin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Cease activity immediately if feeling unwell and go to a cool shaded place to lie down, with legs supported and slightly elevated. > Drink plenty of fluids (avoid caffeine and alcohol). > Try to keep cool by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - turning on a fan or air-conditioner - using a spray bottle of water on the face and body, or a wet towel - having a cool shower or bath. > Massage limbs gently to ease muscle spasms, or massage firmly if cramped, then apply ice packs. > If remaining unwell, seek medical advice as soon as possible.

Condition	Symptoms	What you should do
Heat Syncope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Dizziness and fainting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > May be aggravated by cardiovascular disease, and certain medications. > Cease activity immediately if feeling unwell and go to a cool shaded place to lie down, with legs supported and slightly elevated. > Drink plenty of fluids (avoid caffeine and alcohol). > Try to keep cool by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - turning on a fan or air-conditioner - using a spray bottle of water on the face and body to cool down, or use a wet towel - having a cool shower or bath. > If heat cramps present, massage limbs gently to ease the spasms, or massage firmly if cramped, then apply ice packs. > If remaining unwell, seek medical advice as soon as possible.
Heat Exhaustion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Headaches > High temperature > Profuse sweating > Cold, clammy pale skin > Fatigue, weakness and restlessness > Nausea and vomiting > Weak but rapid pulse > Poor coordination > Circulatory collapse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > May be aggravated by cardiovascular disease, and certain medications. > Cease activity immediately if feeling unwell. > Go to a cool shaded place to lie down, with legs supported and slightly elevated. > Drink plenty of fluids (avoid caffeine and alcohol). > Try to keep cool by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - turning on a fan or air-conditioner - using a spray bottle of water on the face and body to cool down, or use a wet towel - having a cool shower or bath. > Put cool packs under the armpits, in the groin or on the back of the neck (or all 3 places) to reduce body heat. > If heat cramps present, massage limbs gently to ease the spasms, or firmly if cramped, then apply ice packs. > If remaining unwell, especially if vomiting continues in a younger or older person, seek medical assistance immediately. > Go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department, or if this is not possible, call 000 for an ambulance.

Condition	Symptoms	What you should do
Heatstroke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Confusion, headaches, dizziness and nausea > Skin flushed, hot and unusually dry > Intense thirst > Dry, swollen tongue > Sudden rise in high body temperature (40°C+) > Disorientation, delirium > Slurred speech > Aggressive or bizarre behaviour > Sleepiness > Convulsions > Unconsciousness may develop rapidly > Seizures or coma 	<p>HEATSTROKE is an EXTREME MEDICAL EMERGENCY. RING 000 IMMEDIATELY for an ambulance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > May be aggravated by cardiovascular disease, and certain medications. > Cease activity immediately if feeling unwell. > Go to a cool shaded place to lie down, with legs supported and slightly elevated. > Have plenty of sips of water or fruit juice (avoid caffeine and alcohol). > Try to keep cool by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - turning on a fan or air-conditioner - using a spray bottle of water on the face and body to cool down, or use a wet towel - having a cool shower or bath. > Put cool packs under the armpits, in the groin or on the back of the neck (or all three places) to reduce body heat. > If heat cramps present, massage limbs gently to ease the spasms, or firmly if cramped, then apply ice packs. <p>PROVIDING ASSISTANCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Do not give aspirin or paracetamol to a person affected by the heat. > If conscious – give small sips of water or fruit juice and try to keep the person calm. Stay with them until the ambulance arrives. > If unconscious – check airway for breathing and monitor pulse rate until the ambulance arrives.

Being prepared for extreme heat

Planning ahead and being prepared for extreme heat is important. There are several things you can do as hot weather approaches to reduce your risk of being affected by the heat.

Before the weather gets hot

Local heat forecast - regularly check this from the Bureau of Meteorology, the radio, TV or Internet.

Supplies - make sure you have enough food, bottled water and other items you use regularly (such as toothpaste, deodorant) to last up to a week so you do not have to go out in the heat unless absolutely necessary.

Medications - get advice from your doctor about whether your medication may affect what you should do when it gets extremely hot. Make sure you have enough medication to last for more than a week.

Pets - don't forget your pets and make sure you also have a week's supply of food for them as the weather gets hotter.

Emergency Kit - put together a small kit to include a torch, batteries, candles, matches, manual can opener and battery operated radio in case the power goes off. You may also need a first-aid kit, thermometer and a list of important telephone numbers.

Household appliances

- > Check that fridges and freezers work properly.
- > Test fans and air-conditioners. Clean filters and air vents so your cooling system works properly. Make sure your air conditioner is set to **cool**.

Your home

- > If possible, have curtains with pale linings in rooms that get a lot of sunlight to help reflect the heat. Avoid dark reflective curtain linings and metal Venetian blinds as they absorb heat and may make rooms hotter.
- > Consider putting external blinds, shutters or some other shading on windows in rooms which face west.
- > Create a cool room or cool area to go to during extreme heat. Ideally the room or area should be east or south facing and can be cooled using indoor and/or outdoor shading and a fan or air-conditioning.
- > Check that your home can be properly ventilated without compromising security.
- > Have some indoor plants to help your home to look and keep cool.

Talk to a neighbour, relative or close friend about keeping in contact during extreme heat in case you, or they, need any help. Make sure you exchange phone numbers.



Once the weather is hot

Keep out of the heat as much as possible.

Go outside if you need to in the early morning or evening when it is a little cooler. **Apply** plenty of sunscreen (**at least SP15**) regularly.

Follow your doctor's advice if you have any medical conditions.

Avoid strenuous activity like gardening, home improvements or sport.

Listen to your radio, watch the TV or check the Internet for news and information about the heat from SA Health or the SA State Emergency Service (SASES). **Follow** any advice given.

Never leave babies, children or pets alone in a car even if the air-conditioner is on.

Staying cool

Draw blinds and curtains to keep out the heat during the day.

Use a fan or air-conditioner set to cool.

Keep physical activities to a minimum.

Rest if you feel tired to conserve your energy.

Splash cool water on your face and back of the neck.

Take a cool shower or bath to cool yourself down when you feel hot. If this is not possible use a wet flannel or towel to wipe yourself down.

Wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose fitting cotton clothing with long sleeves.

Wear a wide-brimmed hat or take an umbrella with you for shade if you have to go outside.

Chill your pillowcase in the freezer to help you fall asleep faster.

Freeze a damp washcloth to use as a cool compress at night to keep your neck cool.

Drink and eat regularly

Have plenty of cold water and ice in the fridge.

Continue to drink water or fruit juice even if you don't feel thirsty.

Avoid drinking alcohol, tea or coffee as they can make dehydration worse.

Carry a bottle of cold water with you when away from your home.

Avoid eating salty foods.

Try to eat the same amount as you normally would even if you don't feel like eating as your body needs energy to cope with the heat.

Avoid large meals and have smaller amounts of food spread throughout the day.

Try to eat more cold food such as salads and fruit which contain water and are more refreshing in hot weather than cooked foods.

Safe food handling

Wash your hands or use antibacterial hand gel before preparing any food.

Use different preparation boards for meat and vegetables to avoid contaminating food. Clean well after use.

Make sure your fridge is clean, uncluttered and set between 0°C and 5°C.

Take foods out of your fridge only when you need them.

Defrost foods in the fridge, not on the kitchen bench.

Do not re-freeze any food after defrosting. It should be cooked or thrown out if not used on the day of defrosting.

Throw out refrigerated leftover foods if they have not been used within 2 to 3 days.

Do not reheat foods more than once. Food poisoning bacteria can multiply rapidly in food and can still grow in the fridge if it is not cold enough.

Keep food out of the sun as the heat increases the risk of bacteria growing which may cause food poisoning.

Watch your health

Watch out for any symptoms of heat related illness (see pages 4-7).

If you have any symptoms, rest for several hours, try to keep cool and drink plenty of water or fruit juice.

If the symptoms do not go away, or if you start to feel worse, **seek medical advice urgently**:

- > contact your doctor
- > call *healthdirect Australia* on 1800 022 222 or
- > go to the Emergency Department of your nearest hospital.

If you think your symptoms are serious call an ambulance immediately on 000.

Help others

Check daily on family, friends and neighbours, especially if they live on their own.

Assist others if you can with any special needs they have to help them cope during the heat.

Help with getting advice and support if it is needed.

Emergency treatment for a person affected by heat

Heatstroke can kill. It can happen suddenly and quickly lead to unconsciousness (see pages 8-9 for symptoms).

If you think someone has heatstroke, **call 000 immediately** for an ambulance.

While waiting for the ambulance to arrive:

Move the person to somewhere cooler if possible. Keep them still.

Loosen their clothes, sprinkle the person with water, or wrap them in a damp sheet.

Place damp cloths under their armpits, on the back of their neck and on their forehead to cool them down as quickly as possible.

Use a fan if one is available, or hand-fan with a book, or something similar.

Do not give aspirin or paracetamol to a person affected by heat.

If conscious try to keep the person calm. Stay with them until the ambulance arrives. Give them small sips of water or fruit juice.

If unconscious, check the person's airway for breathing and monitor pulse rate until the ambulance arrives.

Extreme Heat

After the extreme heat is over

- > **Continue to drink** plenty of fluids so your body can get back in balance.
- > **Open** windows and doors to let your house cool down, but make sure you don't compromise your security.
- > **Rest and recover** as coping with extremely hot weather can be very tiring.
- > **Go to your doctor** if you feel unwell after the heat is over.
- > **Contact family and friends** to see how they coped and if they need any help.
- > **Reflect on** how well you coped during the extreme heat and what, if anything, you would do differently next time.
- > **Make any** necessary changes to your home so it will be more comfortable for you next time during extreme heat.

