

## Keep cool to prevent heat-related illness

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

**A** blazing orange ball hangs in a hazy morning sky, and the heat is already hitting your face like a furnace blast. The thermometer outside reads 90 degrees — and it's only 9 a.m.

Today's going to be a sizzler.

When the temperature rises, so does the risk of heat-related illness. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, excessive heat causes about 675 deaths each year in the U.S. Extreme heat is dangerous — so dangerous, in fact, that in recent years it has caused more deaths than hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, lightning or any other weather event combined.

"Hot weather is risky because extreme heat can lead people to have very high body temperatures, and then subsequent brain and organ damage and even death," says Linda Degutis, DrPH, MSN, director of CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. "So we do worry about people's exposure to heat and the impact it might have on them."



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Photo courtesy Danielle West

>> For more heat safety tips, visit [www.cdc.gov/features/extremeheat](http://www.cdc.gov/features/extremeheat)

Soaring temperatures can endanger everyone's health, but those at greatest risk include the elderly, infants and children, people who are overweight, outdoor workers, poor or homeless people, and people with chronic medical conditions.

Heat stroke, the most serious heat-related illness, occurs when the body is unable to control its temperature. The warning signs include a body temperature higher than 103 degrees and red, hot and dry skin — but no sweating. Other signs include a rapid pulse, throbbing headache, dizziness, nausea, confusion and unconsciousness.

"If you have any signs of heat stroke, it's a severe emergency and you should call 911," Degutis says.

While waiting for help to arrive, try to cool victims by moving them into a shady area, sponging them with cool water, spraying them with a garden hose or placing them in a tub of cool water or a cool shower.

Heat exhaustion, a milder form of heat-related illness, can progress to heat stroke. Symptoms include heavy sweating, headache, weakness, nausea and fainting.

But no one should ever have to become ill or die because of extreme heat.

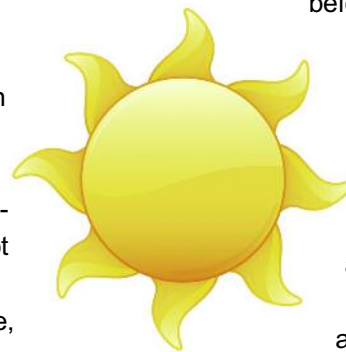
"We can prevent heat-related illnesses by taking some relatively simple precautions," Degutis says. "One of the most important ones clearly is to stay cool as much as possible, and if your home — or where you are — isn't cool enough, often governments or towns have

shelters, particularly for the elderly."

Sweating — you own natural air-conditioning system — is the way your body normally cools itself down. But during extreme heat — and especially when there's a lot of humidity — sweating might not be enough to keep your body temperature at a safe level.

Staying hydrated is crucial to your body's ability to cool itself. During extreme heat, drink more water than you normally do, and don't wait until you feel thirsty. Stay away from sugary beverages or drinks that contain alcohol, as they can deplete your body's supply of

fluid. Sipping sports beverages can help replace the salt and minerals lost during heavy sweating. But if you are on a low-salt or fluid-restricted diet, ask your doctor for advice before increasing fluids or salts.



### Stay cool, stay indoors

When you open the door to an air-conditioned building on a sweltering day, that sweet blast of cold air is a welcome relief — and for good reason. According to CDC, your No. 1 protection against heat-related illness and death is air conditioning. Electric fans help but won't prevent heat-related illness when the mercury inches toward triple digits.

No air conditioning at home? Don't sweat it. Spend the afternoon with relatives or friends who have air conditioning, read a book at the library, take a stroll through the shopping mall or take in a movie. You can also lower your body temperature — and refresh your spirit — by taking cool showers or baths.

Another option is to contact your local health department or government office for locations of shelters that can provide you with relief from the heat.



### Beat the heat when you're outdoors

As the mercury increases, so do outdoor activities. But according to the National Institutes of Health, most heat illnesses happen when people stay out in the heat too long. Limit your family's outdoor activities, especially in the middle of the day when the sun is hottest. And dress for success. Light-colored, lightweight and loose clothing will help you keep your cool.

"We want people to stay active," Degutis says. "We don't want people to do too much on a hot day, but if you know it's going to be hot, the physical activity part of your day should take place early in the day or in the evening when it's cooler and the sun isn't increasing the heat."

Never let a heat wave catch you off guard. Be prepared. Tune in to weather reports and sign up for the free email or text weather alerts provided by local governments.



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