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THE GOOD LIFE

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Staying Cool in a Hotter World

By Bridie Ryan, RN, Adult Family Care & Shared Living Program Supervisor, LifePath

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As global temperatures continue to climb, heat exhaustion is no longer just a hazard for athletes and outdoor laborers; it's becoming a public health concern for all. Understanding the connection between rising temperatures, the body's cooling limits, and proper fluid intake is the key to avoiding these harmful effects.

What Is Heat Exhaustion & Heat Stroke?

Heat exhaustion occurs when the body overheats and can no longer regulate its core temperature effectively. It sits on the spectrum between heat cramps (mild) and heat stroke (life-threatening). Symptoms include heavy sweating, cool or pale skin, a fast or weak pulse, nausea, dizziness, muscle cramping, and profound fatigue. Without intervention, like moving to a cool environment and rehydrating, heat exhaustion can escalate to heat stroke, a medical emergency. The body's primary defense against overheating is sweating. When sweat evaporates from the skin, it draws heat away from the body. But this process depends entirely on having adequate fluid reserves. When those reserves fall short, the cooling system can become overwhelmed and fail.

The Global Warming Connection

Climate scientists have documented a clear and accelerating trend: extreme heat events are becoming more frequent, more intense, and longer lasting. Average global temperatures have risen more than 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels, and heat waves that once occurred once every 50 years now happen roughly five times as often. Urban areas are particularly vulnerable due to the "heat island effect," where concrete, asphalt, and reduced green space trap heat and raise local temperatures several degrees above surrounding rural areas. For residents of cities, especially older adults; those without air conditioning; and people in at-risk communities; prolonged heat exposure is an escalating concern. Heat is already the deadliest weather-

related phenomenon in many countries, claiming more lives annually than hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes. As warming continues, this toll is expected to grow significantly.

How Much Water Do Adults Actually Need?

Fluid needs vary by age, body size, activity level, and climate, but established guidelines offer a solid baseline. The National Academies of Sciences recommends consuming approximately 3.7 liters (about 125 oz) of total daily fluid intake for men and 2.7 liters (about 91 oz) for women. However, these figures assume moderate conditions. In hot weather or during physical activity, requirements increase substantially. A person can lose anywhere from 0.5 to 2 liters of sweat per hour during exercise in heat and all that needs to be replaced to maintain sufficient hydration. Older adults face a compounded risk. The sensation of thirst diminishes with age, meaning many become significantly dehydrated before they feel thirsty. Medications such as diuretics and certain blood pressure lowering agents can accelerate fluid loss. This makes proactive, scheduled hydration

at regular intervals, regardless of thirst, essential for adults over 65.

Practical Steps for Protection

The most effective strategy is prevention. Drink water consistently throughout the day rather than in large amounts at once. During outdoor activity in summer heat, aim for 6–8 ounces every 15 to 20 minutes. Electrolyte drinks can help during prolonged exertion, as sweat also depletes sodium and potassium,

but avoid high-sugar options that can slow absorption. Pay attention to urine color: pale yellow signals good hydration, while dark yellow or amber indicates you're behind. Limit alcohol and caffeine during heat waves, as both promote fluid loss. During heat waves, seek out indoor activities like going to museums, movies, shopping malls, or libraries. Communities often offer cooling centers, including senior centers, designated to offer relief from the heat. When outside try to find shaded areas. Wearing hats, sunglasses, loose-fitting clothing, and sun block or protective clothing can help too. As the planet warms, people need to strategize ways to stay cool and prevent heat-related illnesses. Staying hydrated is no longer just sensible self-care; it's an essential adaptation to a changing climate.

For more on how to care for yourself during a heat wave visit mass.gov/doc/what-should-i-do-during-an-extreme-heat-event/download.

Get \$25 Worth of Farmer's Market Coupons for Free

Craving some fresh squash or ripe strawberries? LifePath will be distributing free farmer's market coupon booklets, worth \$25 per person. One of these coupon booklets could be yours! The coupons are part of a program from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, designed to help older adults get fresh fruits and vegetables and to help local farmers sell more produce. In order to be eligible for the coupon booklet, you must be at least 60 years old and reside in Franklin County or the North Quabbin area, and earn \$2,461 per month or less as an individual, or \$3,337 per month or less as a couple. For each additional family member, please add \$876 per month to the income limit. You will need to sign your name to attest that you meet the criteria to receive a coupon booklet. You do not need to attend a senior center or participate in any other programs to be eligible.

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Saint Mary's Parish Hall behind church in Orange, 10 AM to 11:30 AM

The Senior Center, 7 Main St., Shelburne Falls, 12:30 PM to 2:30 PM

Coupon booklets will be available **Friday, July 31**, at:

Greenfield Senior Center, 35 Pleasant St., Greenfield, 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM

Coupon booklets will be available **Thursday, August 6**, at:

Gill/Montague Senior Center, 62 Fifth St., Turners Falls, 10:30 AM to Noon

Erving Senior Community Center, 1 Care Drive, Erving, Noon to 3 PM

South County Senior Center, 22 Amherst Rd, Sunderland, 12:30 PM to 1:30 PM

Bernardston Senior Center, 20 Church St., Bernardston, Noon to 1:30 PM

Northfield Senior Center, 69 Main St., Northfield, 12:30 PM to 3 PM

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