

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Heat Hazards: Staying Safe, Hydrated and Happy This Summer

From picnics to cottages, to patios: summer is a favourite time of year for most people. The hot weather and long days allow us to enjoy a lot of time outdoors, but as the temperature and humidity rises, so does the risk for heat-related illness. Dehydration, heat exhaustion and other serious conditions can bring a bad end to a good time. Luckily, by following these tips you can keep your cool and prevent yourself from overheating.

Dress the part. Wear lightweight, loose-fitting and light-coloured clothing instead of dark, tight clothes that hold in heat. Natural fabrics like cotton and linen are more breathable, so try to avoid synthetics. Never forget your shades and, if you have long hair, tie it back away from your face.

Prevent sunburns. Use an umbrella or a light-coloured hat to protect yourself from the sun and regularly apply sunscreen to exposed skin. Sunscreen should be of SPF 15 or higher, used at least 20 minutes before going outside and reapplied every two hours. A sunburn can make it harder for your body to cool itself and can have negative long-term effects on your skin, including certain types of skin cancer.

Drink lots of fluids. Staying hydrated ensures that your body maintains a healthy temperature. Stay away from drinks with alcohol or caffeine, which can actually dehydrate you. Drink lots of water throughout the day—even if you don't feel thirsty.

Eat for the season. Heavy and hot meals only add heat to your body. Try enjoying a diet of cold summer foods like salad and seafood. Make homemade popsicles and smoothies, and munch on frozen grapes, berries or bananas. You can also consider making the most of the outdoors and cook meals on the barbeque.

Keep rooms cool. Close windows, curtains and blinds in the morning to block the sun's rays and to keep your home cool throughout the day. Try opening the windows at night to let in fresh, cool air. Lights and electronics often emit a large amount of heat, so turn these off whenever possible. Set up fans around the house, but just remember that they only move air around and can't cool it down. For the best results, place fans in front of an open window or next to a bowl of ice for a nice breeze.

Find shelter. Spending some time in an air-conditioned building is the best way to escape high temperatures. If you don't have air conditioning at home, shopping malls, movie theatres and libraries are all great places to stay cool.

Get wet. Bathe, shower and soak your feet regularly for an instant cool down. Visit your community swimming pool, fill up the wading pool in your backyard and load up your kids' water toys for active ways to beat the heat.

Shift your routine. If you exercise outdoors, try getting active in the morning or evening when it's likely to be cooler outside and the air quality—especially on muggy days—tends to be better. Avoid activities in the direct sunlight or on asphalt surfaces and instead get active in the pool or shady areas. Take frequent breaks, regularly replenish your fluids, slow down and pay attention to your body. It's a good idea to avoid strenuous activities altogether in extreme heat.

Keep an eye out. During a heat wave, regularly check in on family, friends and neighbours. In particular, children, seniors and people with chronic diseases are most susceptible to heat-related illness and some medications may also increase this risk. Never leave anyone unattended in a car and don't forget that pets also need protection from the heat.

Know the signs. Know that if you or someone you're with starts to experience weakness, headaches, dizziness, muscle cramps, nausea, vomiting or a rapid heartbeat following sun exposure—you are probably suffering from a heat-related illness. Try to bring the body's temperature down by getting somewhere cool, drinking water, misting the skin and using ice packs. If symptoms don't improve within 60 minutes, you must contact a doctor. If any of these signs are accompanied with a fever, fainting or confusion, seek medical attention immediately.

It's hard not to overindulge during the sunny skies and hot weather of summer—especially if you're in an area where winter consumes more than half your year. By following the simple steps above, you'll stay cool, safe and ensure you get the most out of what the summer has to offer.
© 2026 LifeWorks (Canada) Ltd. Your program may not include all services described on this website, please refer to your benefit material for more information. For immediate assistance, call 1.844.880.9137.