Healthy in THE HEAT

A guide to coping with hot weather and heatwaves.

sahealth.sa.gov.au/healthyintheheat

Government of South Australia
SA Health

Contents

1. Introduction 2
What is a heatwave? 3

2. Heat-related illness 4
Signs to watch out for and what to do 4
Are you drinking enough water? 5
Heat exhaustion and heatstroke 6
Emergency treatment for a person affected by the heat 8

3. Prepare for hot weather 9

4. What to do in hot weather 10
Simple healthy in the heat tips for everybody 10
Hot weather and pregnancy 11
Hot weather and exercise 12
Babies and young children 13
Older people 14
People with chronic or mental health conditions 15
Pets 16
Hot weather and food safety 17
Hot weather and sleep 18

5. After hot weather has passed 19

6. More information 20
Emergency telephone numbers 20
Helpful telephone numbers 20
Broadcast media – ABC Emergency 21
Helpful websites 21
Helpful social media pages 22
Helpful apps for mobile devices 23

1. Introduction

During the summer months, South Australia can experience long periods of hot weather and heatwaves.

Everyone is at risk of heat-related illness during hot weather and heatwaves. Some groups are more at risk than others, including:

- babies and young children
- pregnant women
- older people (especially those living alone)
- people with chronic illnesses (renal, cardiovascular and mental health)
- people with mobility issues.

This guide helps you stay safe during hot weather. It gives advice on:

- understanding heat-related illness
- preparing for hot weather and heatwaves
- reducing your risk of getting sick
- helping yourself and others with heat-related illness
- staying safe and healthy after a period of hot weather
- what to do in an emergency while waiting for an ambulance.

In a medical emergency, always call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance.

What is a heatwave?

Heatwaves are periods of continuous hot weather.

The State Emergency Service (SES) is the control agency for severe weather in South Australia. Throughout summer, the Bureau of Meteorology predicts average daily temperatures and overnight minimum temperatures, then works with the SES to issue heatwave warnings.

South Australia can experience many heatwaves, so it is important to know:

- what the effects of heatwaves are
- who is at risk
- how you can prepare for it and cope.

For more information about heatwaves, visit www.ses.sa.gov.au.

Check radio, television and online news regularly for information and advice.

A heatwave is more than just 'hotter than usual' weather



When temperatures are hotter than 35°C, your body may not be able to cool you down enough for you to stay healthy, especially if you are an older person or if you are taking medicines for existing conditions.



In a heatwave, you are more likely to develop a heat-related illness and become unwell much faster than you would when in warm or hot weather.

2. Heat-related illness

It is easy to overheat and become dehydrated in hot weather, which can lead to serious conditions and illnesses like heat exhaustion and, in extreme cases, heatstroke.

Early signs of dehydration and heat-related illness include:

- sweating heavily
- having a raised temperature
- feeling tired and lethargic
- reduced appetite
- feeling thirsty
- being irritable
- having medium to dark coloured urine
- twitching or having painful muscle cramps in the arms, legs or abdomen
- feeling dizzy and faint.

If you or someone you know is showing these signs and feeling unwell:

- stop what you are doing, go to a cool, shaded place and lie down
- drink plenty of water or other fluids, avoiding caffeine and alcohol
- try to cool down with a fan or an air-conditioner, a cool damp towel around your neck, cool water sprayed on your skin or by having a cool shower or bath
- use massage to ease any spasms or cramps, then use ice packs
- if still unwell after taking these steps, seek medical advice as soon as possible.

ARE YOU DRINKING ENOUGH WATER?



The colour of your urine can tell you if you are drinking enough water or if you are dehydrated.



VERY DEHYDRATED

Drink a large bottle of water straight away



DEHYDRATED

Drink two to three glasses of water now



SOMEWHAT DEHYDRATED

Drink a large glass of water now



HYDRATED

You are drinking enough water – keep drinking water at the same rate

Heat exhaustion and heatstroke

More serious heat-related illnesses include heat exhaustion and heatstroke. Both conditions can be made worse if the person suffering them has a heart (cardiovascular) disease or if they are taking certain medications.



Heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a mild to moderate illness caused by your body losing too much water or salt. It can happen after being in high heat or doing intense physical exercise. Signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion include (in addition to those on page 4):

- headaches
- having a raised temperature
- sweating heavily
- anxiety
- fatigue, weakness and restlessness
- nausea and vomiting
- weak, rapid pulse
- poor coordination.

What to do if you or someone else shows the signs of heat exhaustion:

- stop what you are doing, go to a cool, shaded place and lie down with legs slightly lifted
- slowly sip plenty of water or fruit juice, avoiding caffeine and alcohol
- cool down with a fan or an air-conditioner, spray cool water on skin or have a cool shower or bath
- reduce body temperature by putting cool packs under the armpits, in the groin and on the back of the neck
- use massage to ease spasms or cramps, then use ice packs.

If symptoms of heat exhaustion last for more than an hour, call 000 immediately for an ambulance or go to a hospital emergency department.

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is a serious medical emergency that needs immediate treatment. If not treated, it can lead to permanent damage to vital organs or even death.

Heatstroke happens when a person's temperature is greater than 40°C and they show signs of confusion, seizures or unconsciousness. It is caused from exposure to extreme heat or intense physical exercise.

If you notice any of the following signs and symptoms of heatstroke in yourself or others, call 000 immediately for an ambulance:

- headaches, dizziness, nausea, vomiting and confusion
- having flushed, hot and unusually dry skin
- being extremely thirsty
- having a dry, swollen tongue
- having a sudden rise in body temperature to more than 40°C
- being disoriented or delirious
- slurred speech
- being aggressive or behaving strangely
- convulsions, seizures, unconsciousness or coma
- sweating and skin may feel deceptively cool
- rapid pulse.

Heatstroke is an extreme medical emergency.

If you think you or someone else is suffering from heatstroke, call 000 immediately for an ambulance.

SEE THE NEXT PAGE FOR EMERGENCY TREATMENT FOR HEATSTROKE.

Emergency treatment for a person affected by the heat

Heatstroke is an extreme medical emergency. If not treated immediately, it can lead to permanent damage to vital organs or even death.

If you notice any of the signs and symptoms of heatstroke in yourself or others, call 000 immediately for an ambulance.

While waiting for the ambulance to arrive:

- if possible, move the person to somewhere cool and keep them still
- loosen their clothes, sprinkle them with cool water, or wrap them in a damp sheet
- place cool, damp cloths in their armpits, on the back of their neck and on their forehead to cool them down as quickly as possible
- use a fan to help cool them down if one is available
- do not give aspirin or paracetamol to a person affected by heat.

If the person is conscious:

- try to keep them calm
- give them small sips of water or fruit juice
- stay with them until the ambulance arrives.

If the person is unconscious:

- check their airway is clear
- monitor their pulse rate
- stay with them until the ambulance arrives.

3. Prepare for hot weather

Simple steps to stay safe and healthy during very hot weather.

Before summer begins



Check your fans and air-conditioners to make sure they are working and that filters, pads and air vents are clean.



If you have been using a reverse-cycle air-conditioner, make sure it is set to 'cool' before summer begins.



Learn the signs of heat related illness so you can respond quickly if you or someone you know becomes sick.



If you regularly take medicines, check with your doctor about whether they will affect what you should do when it gets very hot.



Put together a small emergency kit, including a torch, batteries, a first aid kit and a list of important telephone numbers.



Think about how you will look after your pets and keep them healthy and cool when the weather gets very hot.



Make a plan for keeping in regular contact with friends and neighbours when it is very hot in case you or they need help.



Make sure you have food and other groceries at home so you are less likely to need to go out when it is really hot.

4. What to do in hot weather

Tips and advice about caring for vulnerable people who can be affected by hot weather and heat-related illness.

Simple steps to stay healthy in the heat

Here are some simple steps we should all take to help us to stay healthy in the heat:



Drink plenty of fluids – water is best. Avoid caffeine and alcohol.



Check local weather forecasts so you know when hot weather is coming and you can plan ahead.



If you do have to go outside during the day, wear long, loose-fitting clothing and a hat, and apply plenty of SPF50+ sunscreen (reapply every 2 hours).



If you have been prescribed medicines, keep taking them regularly.



Stay indoors as much as you can with a fan or air-conditioner on.



Avoid going outside during the hottest part of the day.



If you prefer to exercise outside, do it early in the day when it is cooler.



Keep curtains, blinds and windows closed during the day to keep your home cool.



Look out for family and friends who may be at risk of heat-related illness, and older people who live alone.

Hot weather and pregnancy

If you are pregnant, it is important to follow the tips in this guide when the weather is hot.



During pregnancy, most people have higher body temperatures, making them more sensitive to heat in hot weather.

For this reason, pregnant people need to take extra steps to make sure they and their unborn babies do not overheat.

If you feel unwell because of the heat, it is important that you stop what you are doing and lie down in a cool, air-conditioned room.

Pace yourself. Ask for help if you are too hot or tired to cook, clean, or run errands. Put your feet up whenever you can. Growing a baby is hard work and you need plenty of rest during the day.

If you continue to experience heat-related symptoms as described in this guide, speak with your general practitioner (GP), obstetrician, midwife or the maternity unit where you plan to give birth for specific medical advice.

Lying and sleeping on your left side will mean that more blood and nutrients will reach the placenta and your baby.

In a medical emergency, always call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance.

Hot weather and exercise

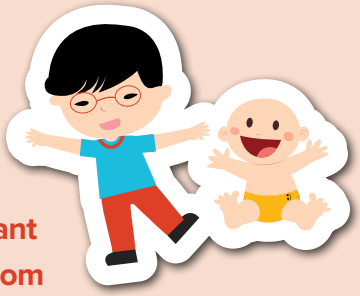


Staying healthy in hot weather may mean you have to change your exercise routine to reduce your risk of heat-related illness.

When the weather is hot, it is important to:

- Use common sense – exercise moderately and, if you start to feel ill, slow down and stop.
- Wear light-coloured, loose-fitting clothes made from natural fibres like cotton to keep you cool and let sweat evaporate more easily.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise.
- If you like to exercise outside, do it early in the day when the temperature is cooler and try to stay in the shade.
- During daylight hours, wear a hat and sunglasses, and make sure you apply SPF50+ sunscreen at least 20 minutes before you go outdoors (and reapply every 2 hours).
- Keep cool by modifying your routine – for example, swap a run for a swim or work out in an air-conditioned room or gym.

Babies and young children



Babies and young children are very sensitive to hot weather, so it is important to watch them closely and stop them from getting dehydrated or too hot. If you think your child is unwell due to hot weather, seek medical attention.

In hot weather, **breast-fed babies** may need extra breast-feeds, but if they are under six months it is not recommended to give them water. **Bottle-fed babies** may need extra feeds and can be offered small amounts of cooled boiled water as needed.

Make sure young children have regular drinks throughout the day. Water is best. Avoid giving them sugary or fizzy drinks.

Dress babies and young children in light, loose-fitting clothing, like singlets and nappies, or loose tops.

Never leave babies or children in a car.

Choose the coolest place in your home for babies or young children to sleep, making sure air can circulate around their bassinet or cot.

Avoid taking babies or young children out in the hottest part of the day. If you go out, stay in the shade, protect their skin with loose-fitting clothing and a hat.

To help babies and young children cool down, sponge them with lukewarm (not cold) water.

Avoid using baby carriers and slings in the heat as they restrict airflow and babies may be more likely to overheat.

Older people

As we age, we have a higher risk of heat-related illness, especially if we live alone, have medical conditions, or take certain medicines.



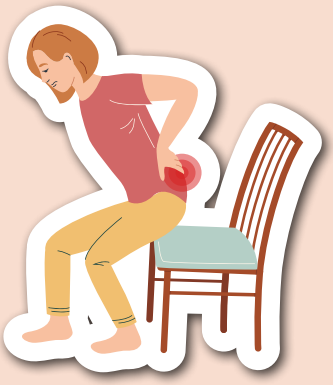
Older people are less likely to notice when they are overheated or dehydrated, and some medications can make this worse. They are also less able to cool their body by sweating.

Speak with your doctor or pharmacist for advice about medicines you are taking. If you are an older person or if you care for someone who is older, the following tips may help:

- Use air-conditioners and fans set to cool, put a wet cloth around your neck, or put your feet in a bowl of cool water.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day, even if you do not feel thirsty, and take a bottle of water wherever you go.
- Swap large meals for smaller ones. Make cool meals, like salads, and avoid using ovens or stoves in hot weather as they can make your home much hotter.
- Arrange for a friend or relative to visit you twice a day to check how you are and that you have everything you need to stay healthy in the heat.
- Register with the free Australian Red Cross TeleRedi Service on 1800 188 071. Trained Red Cross volunteers call older people up to three times a day to make sure they are well and coping in hot weather.
- A trip to an air-conditioned public space, like the local library, cinema or shopping centre, may give you some relief from hot weather. But remember, avoid going outside in the hottest part of the day.

People with chronic or mental health conditions

If you or someone you care for have a chronic health condition (e.g. renal, cardiovascular and mental health), or if you take certain medicines, you may be more likely to have health problems when the weather is hot.



Medicines may change how your body responds to hot weather and could mean you do not realise that you are becoming overheated or dehydrated.

Check with your doctor about how much water you should drink when the weather is hot and always carry a bottle of water with you.

Ask your doctor or GP about the medicines you take and how to reduce the risks of health problems during hot weather.

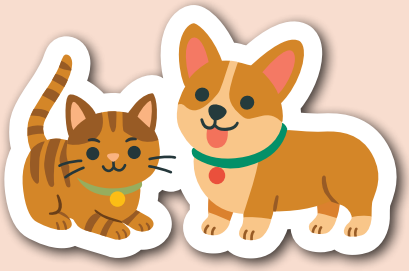
Continue taking your medicines as they have been prescribed by your doctor.

Ask a friend or relative to check in with you every day to see how you are and make sure you have everything you need to stay healthy in the heat, especially if you live alone.

Be alert: A person with a mental health condition or a cognitively-impaired person may not be able to tell you when they are feeling hot or unwell.

Pets

Like people, animals can be affected by hot weather and suffer heat-related illnesses. Follow these tips to keep your pets cool when the weather is hot:



If possible, bring pets inside when the weather is hot. If they cannot be indoors, make sure they have plenty of shelter and shade. Pets in cages, like birds, rabbits and guinea pigs, need to be kept indoors or in shade at all times of the day on extremely hot days.

Never walk your dog on hot pavements, roads or sand – paws are sensitive and burn easily.

Do not leave your pet's food outside in the heat – if they do not eat it straight away, cover it and put it in the fridge for later.

Make sure your pets have plenty of clean, fresh water to drink. Put out two large bowls of water each day, in case one runs out or is knocked over, and put both in the shade so they stay cooler for longer.

Never leave pets in a closed shed, garage or car – the temperature inside will get very hot very quickly, even if the windows are down.

Walk your dog early in the morning or later in the day when it's cooler.

If your pet is showing signs of heat stress, like panting, sweating or drooling:

- move them to a cool place
- try to get them to drink water – you may have to pour some into their mouth
- if your dog is overheated, stand them in water up to their belly
- seek urgent medical attention for your pet from a vet.

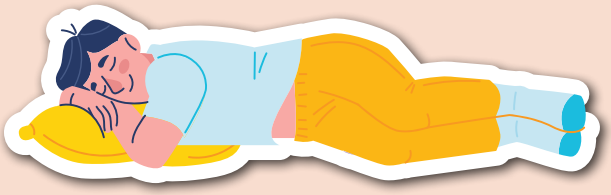
Hot weather and food safety

Food safety is especially important in hot weather and during a heatwave. Bacteria grows much more quickly on food when conditions are hot, increasing the risk of food poisoning.



- Make sure your fridge is clean, uncluttered and set at 5°C or less.
- Don't leave food out for too long (never more than 2 hours out of the fridge).
- Defrost foods in the fridge or the microwave, not on the kitchen bench.
- Take insulated cooler bags to the shops to carry chilled and frozen foods.
- Put leftovers in the fridge as soon as they stop steaming.
- Immediately pack chilled and frozen foods in the fridge and freezer when you get home.
- Keep leftovers in fridge and eat within 2-3 days.
- Never leave food in a hot car.

For more information about food safety and how you can prevent food poisoning, visit www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/foodsafety



Hot weather and sleep

It can be more difficult to get the sleep you need when the weather is very hot.

Try these tips to help you get a better night sleep:

Keep curtains, blinds and windows closed during the day to keep your home cool.

Exercise and strenuous activities should be done earlier in the day to allow your body time to cool down before going to bed.

If you have an air conditioner, put it on before you go to bed to let the room cool down.

Having a cool shower or bath just before going to bed will help bring your temperature down, making it easier to get to sleep.

Sleep in the coolest room in your home – it might not be a bedroom.

Cool down with a wet towel or water spray bottle.

Limit daytime naps to early afternoon and make sure they are short.

If you use a fan in the bedroom, keep the door open to improve airflow.

Choose breathable, lightweight fabrics like cotton for your bedding and clothing to keep cool.

5. After hot weather has passed

What to do when hot weather or extreme heat has passed.

Coping with hot weather can be stressful, tiring and may take you a couple of days to completely recover.



Continue to drink plenty of water so your body can get back in balance.



Contact family and friends to see how they coped and to check if they need any help.



Open doors and windows with locking security screens to let cool air though your home.



Think about the things that you could do differently so you are better able to cope next time it is hot.



Get plenty of rest and, if you feel unwell, make a time to see your doctor.



Make any necessary changes to your home so it will be more comfortable next time there is hot weather or a heatwave.

6. More Information

Where to go for more information.



Emergency telephone numbers

In a medical emergency, always call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance.

For emergency assistance due to fallen trees, blackouts and structural damage to buildings caused by severe winds and storms, contact SES on 132 500.



Helpful telephone numbers

1800MEDICARE	**1800 633 422**
South Australia Parent Helpline (Women's and Children's Health Network)	**1300 364 100**
Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline (Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care)	**1800 882 436**
Australian Red Cross TeleRedi Service	**1800 188 071**
Mental Health Triage Service	**13 14 65**

Broadcast media – ABC Emergency

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) delivers official warnings and alerts, and publishes coverage about emergencies, including a heatwave.

ABC Radio
ABC Radio broadcasts throughout metropolitan and regional South Australia. To find the ABC Radio frequency in your area or an area you will be visiting during a heatwave, visit https://reception.abc.net.au

ABC Emergency website
www.abc.net.au/news/emergency

Helpful websites

SA State Emergency Services alerts and advice
www.ses.sa.gov.au

Weather warnings and alerts
www.bom.gov.au/warnings-and-alerts

Power outages map
https://outage.apps.sapowernetworks.com.au

Health information
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/healthyintheheat

Parenting and children's health information
www.cafhs.sa.gov.au

South Australian Government services
www.sa.gov.au

Helpful social media pages

SA Health

www.facebook.com/sahealth

www.instagram.com/sahealth_

www.x.com/sahealth

SA State Emergency Service (SES)

www.facebook.com/SAStateEmergencyService

www.x.com/SA_SES

Department of Human Services SA

www.facebook.com/HumanServicesSA

www.x.com/HumanServicesSA

The Bureau of Meteorology (SA)

www.x.com/BOM_SA

SA Power Networks

www.facebook.com/SAPowerNetworks

www.x.com/SAPowerNetworks

ABC Emergency

www.facebook.com/ABCemergency



Helpful apps for mobile devices

The following apps are available via the Apple App Store or Google Play for Android:

Bureau of Meteorology (BOM)

www.bom.gov.au/app/

1800MEDICARE

www.digitalhealth.gov.au/1800MEDICAREapp

SunSmart

www.sunsmart.com.au/resources/sunsmart-app

Important Phone Numbers

For more information

Disaster Management Branch
Public Health Planning and Response
Public Health Division

11 Hindmarsh Square
Adelaide SA 5000
E-mail: health.disastermanagementbranch@sa.gov.au
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/healthyintheheat

© Department for Health and Wellbeing, Government of South Australia.
All rights reserved. ISBN: 978-1-74243-017-1
26108 Oct 2026.
SAH reorder item number 76106755

Government of South Australia

SA Health