

alzheimer's association™

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Keeping Cool and Safe During the Heat Wave

SEATTLE, July 27, 2009 -- The National Weather Service says near record hot temperatures are expected across Western Washington this week.

An excessive heat watch is in effect from Monday afternoon through Thursday afternoon.

Older people are especially at risk from heat-related health problems such as heatstroke and heat exhaustion. With the heat wave we are currently experiencing, now is not the time to do chores, run errands or weed your garden.

"Heat can be a challenge for all ages, but potentially life threatening for older persons," according to Joanne Maher, Social Services Director for the Alzheimer's Association, Western and Central Washington State Chapter. "People with dementia often fail to drink enough fluids in the first place and probably won't recognize that they have not had enough intake; they may not dress appropriately for the weather either, therefore increasing their risk during the heat wave. Caregivers of people with dementia will need to be on 'high-alert' with the person they are caring for."

Recognizing heat exhaustion and heat stroke

When people's bodies can't cool themselves quickly enough it can cause heat exhaustion. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include muscle cramps, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea and vomiting. If you see someone with signs of overheating, move the person to a cooler location, have them rest for a few minutes and then slowly drink a cool beverage. Get medical attention for them immediately if they do not feel better.

Heat exhaustion can lead to heat stroke, which can cause death or permanent disability unless treated immediately. Symptoms of heat stroke include:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)
- Red, hot, and dry skin
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Nausea, confusion and unconsciousness

10 tips* for dealing with a heat wave:

1. Relax and put off chores and any strenuous activity.
2. Stay indoors during the hottest times of the day.
3. Close your shades to keep out the sunshine.
4. If you do not have air conditioning, stay on the lower-level in your home -- heat rises.
5. Check with your local agency for cool places you can go such as libraries and public buildings, or a mall with air conditioning (see resource list below).
6. Wear light-weight, loose fitting clothing and protect yourself from the sun by wearing a hat, sunglasses or using an umbrella.
7. Drink plenty of water *even* if you are not thirsty. This helps keep your body cool.
8. Avoid alcohol or caffeinated beverages.
9. If you have a chronic medical condition, talk with your doctor about additional precautions you should take to prevent heat related illness. Some conditions and medications may place you at higher risk. Certain medications may increase sensitivity to the heat. Do not take salt tablets unless your doctor tells you to.
10. Neighbors, friends or family should check in on older people in their homes to make sure they are not suffering from the heat.

To find an air-conditioned place to stay cool, contact:

Washington State Association of Area Agencies on Aging
<http://www.agingwashington.org>
(360) 485-9761

Washington State Library Finder
http://www.secstate.wa.gov/library/search_library.aspx

Washington State Association of Senior Centers
<http://www.wsasc.org/pages/seniorcenters.html>

Washington State Shopping Malls list
<http://www.everythingnorthwest.com/washington-state-shopping-malls.php>