

Seniors need to take heat precautions

With parts of Kansas under a heat advisory from the National Weather Service, the Kansas Department on Aging cautions that seniors can be especially prone to hyperthermia because of external heat gain, increased heat production and impaired heat dissipation. Hypothermia causes the heart to be overworked pumping blood to the skin's outer edge to assist in the body's efforts to release heat.

Here are some tips for dealing with heat for the older population.

- Drink plenty of water. Seniors often lose some of the sensation of being thirsty when exposed to high temperatures. Drink two to four cups of fluids (but no caffeine or alcohol) an hour - even if you don't feel thirsty. If you are going somewhere, take a bottle of water with you. The American Geriatrics Society also recommends sports drinks such as Gatorade, because they contain electrolytes that your body loses when dehydrated.
- Eat lightly. Often foods that are high in protein take more energy to digest, which in turn, requires the body to generate more heat.
- Douse yourself periodically with water in a tub, shower or with wet towels. Even a cool foot bath helps.
- Wear loose, lightweight clothing. Wear a hat and sunscreen and stay in the shade.
- Keep your living quarters cool, preferably with an air conditioner or electric fan. If you don't have AC or fans, go to a senior center or other air-conditioned public location. Some area agencies on aging, churches and civic organizations provide senior citizens transportation to cooler locations on sweltering days.
- Some medications cause greater sensitivity to sun. Check with your pharmacist or doctor about any precautions you need to take.
- Avoid exertion or exercise, especially during the hottest part of the day. Also limit physical activity during times of high humidity and heat, especially if you have asthma or other lung conditions.

Early warning signs of heat-related illness can include dizziness and not needing to go to the bathroom as often as usual. If ignored, symptoms can worsen to include the painful muscle spasms that signal heat cramps.

It's also recommended that friends, neighbors and relatives keep an eye on elders around them to make sure they are safe.