

EXTREME TEMPERATURES

During extreme heat, when older adults are vulnerable to heat related disorders, staff and patients should follow these measures.

Definitions:

Heat Exhaustion: A disorder resulting from overexposure to heat or sun. Early symptoms are headache and a feeling of weakness and dizziness, usually accompanied by nausea and vomiting.

There may also be cramps in the muscles of the arms, legs, or abdomen. The person turns pale and perspires profusely, skin is cool and moist, and pulse and breathing are rapid.

Body temperature remains at a normal level or slightly below or above. The person may seem confused and may find it difficult to coordinate body movements.

Heat Stroke: A profound disturbance of the body's heat-regulating mechanism, caused by prolonged exposure to excessive heat, particularly when there is little or no air circulation.

The first symptoms may be headache, dizziness and weakness. Later symptoms are an extremely high fever and absence of perspiration. Heat stroke may cause convulsions and sudden loss of consciousness. In extreme cases it can be fatal.

Precautionary Procedures:

1. Keep air circulating with use of fans or an air conditioner.
2. Draw shades, blinds and curtains in rooms when exposed to direct sunlight and have patient move from areas exposed to direct sunlight.
3. Check to see that patient is appropriately dressed.
4. Keep outdoor activities to a minimum.
5. Give ample fluids, and provide as many fluids as the patient will take.
6. Report any changes in the patient's condition (ie. edema, shortness of breath, the skin being hot or dry) to physician.
7. Assist in transfer to hospital, if necessary.

If symptoms of Heat Exhaustion are experienced by office staff or in the field:

1. Keep outdoor activities to a minimum.
2. Report symptoms to immediate supervisor.