

Seniors Stay Cool!

By Laila Pera, CSA

Warm weather is welcome to us all, but does present some particular challenges for our seniors. While we should all be encouraged to enjoy the fresh air and sunshine, particular attention should be taken to proper hydration and sun protection.

Here are some tips to enjoy the sun and warmth but not overdo it!

1. Stay hydrated! As our appetite seems to wane as we age, so does our apparent thirst. It's important to take in fluids even if we don't seem to feel the need. Water is the best, but coffee, tea and other cool drinks, popsicles, ice cream, etc. provide hydration, cool and calories. In past, there was an argument that coffee dehydrated people more than helped them but recently this myth seems to have been dispelled. Keep a bottle of water handy. Environmental concerns have condoned the use of disposable water bottles but this has also created a variety of re-usable water containers that we can fill at home. Stainless steel is very good and there are some plastics that are also user friendly. Be sure that they are washed thoroughly between use and only refill after this thorough cleaning. Bacteria can grow quickly in a water bottle so don't let your fresh water use backfire on you.
2. Take your time! As the temperature rises, your body will also rise in heat more quickly. Plan to do errands and chores with time put aside to rest and relax. Plan your trips to take advantage of cooler temperatures in the morning or later evening and avoid the glaring hot afternoons.
3. Dress for success! Take time to choose lightweight clothing and put on in layers so that it's easy to remove a sweater or jacket when necessary. It may feel cool when setting out but be sure that you have the ability to remove a layer when you feel the heat increasing. Get out that summer hat and keep it on. It may feel cooler when it's off but in the long run that big brim will save your poor head and body from the extra heat. Your shoes should be cool and light – remember your feet will swell a bit in the heat. Sandals are great – just be sure that they are safe and stable.
4. Use your sunscreen! UV rays are much stronger now than when you were younger. There are myriad of sunscreen products on the market – be sure to check with your pharmacy for advice about the ones that will be best for you. There are sprays, creams and oils but all come with definitions of sun protection. For any seniors, I would recommend at least a thirty sunblock number and higher would be even better!
5. Heat exhaustion dangerous! If you feel fatigue, weakness, nausea, heavy sweating, no sweating, rapid pulse, confusion or feel faint – be sure to move into a cool area and get some cool water or juice. If you can, get a cold compress and ask for help at any signs of the above. This can be a very serious situation and you must be alert to it.

By all means, enjoy the warmer weather – it can be delightful for stiff joints and cold hands and feet but do so with care and caution.