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Healthy Insights

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Summer Health and Safety Tips

Summer is just around the corner, and for many, that means trips to the beach, cookouts, baseball games and vacations. Yet extra health and safety precautions, particularly for older adults, may be required. In this issue of Healthy Insights, we share some ways to stay safe and healthy this summer.

Reduce Your Risk of Skin Cancer

Being outside is an excellent way to be more active while soaking up Vitamin D. However, it is important to protect your skin from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays, which can cause skin cancer. Because UV rays are present even on cloudy days, sunscreen is recommended all year. Use sunscreen with a sun protective factor (SPF) of at least 15, and protect your skin with these other tips:

- Avoid being outside when the sun is strongest, usually between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- If you can't avoid the outdoors during those hours, seek a shady spot under an umbrella, tree or other shelter.
- Wear sun-protective clothing which is certified to offer UV protection; if this is not possible, wear long sleeves and pants to keep your skin protected.



- Wear a hat to protect your head, eyes and face.
- Wear sunglasses that protect from both UVA and UVB rays.

A Few Words About Sunscreen

For best results, apply a thick layer of sunscreen that is rated to offer protection from both UVA and UVB rays. Pay special attention to hard-to-reach areas such as your neck, back and ears. Sunscreen has a short shelf life; check the expiration date to ensure effectiveness. Lastly, sunscreen is not recommended for use on babies under the age of 6 months. Instead, keep them out of the sun.

Avoid Heat-Related Illness

The dog days of summer can be deadly for older adults and those who are at high risk for heat-related illnesses. Older adults may lose their ability to regulate their body temperature, leaving them more vulnerable as the mercury rises. Certain medications or chronic illnesses can also interfere with the ability to regulate body temperature.

Know the Warning Signs

Learn to recognize the warning signs of heat-related illness, including:

- Sudden dizziness, nausea, weakness, excessive thirst
- Swelling in the legs or ankles
- Clammy skin
- Rapid pulse

If you notice these signs, take immediate steps to cool down by finding an air-conditioned environment and drinking water to prevent dehydration.

Heat Stroke: A Medical Emergency

Heat stroke can be a life-threatening medical emergency. Seek immediate medical assistance if you notice these signs and symptoms:

- Fainting
- Behavior changes
- Body temperature over 104 degrees
- Dry skin (no longer sweating despite the heat)
- Strong and rapid or weak and slow pulse

Keep Your Cool This Summer

These tips can help older adults stay safe in the summer heat.

- Check medications to determine if any of them might affect the body's ability to regulate temperature.
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water; don't wait until thirsty to drink.

- Wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Maintain the air conditioning at home. If there is no conditioning, use fans but avoid stretching electric cords across the floor where they might become a tripping hazard.
- Consider staying with a friend or relative during a heatwave if the home lacks air conditioning.
- Avoid using the oven on very hot days.
- Arrange for a friend or family member to periodically check on those who live alone.

Enjoy Yourself

Summer offers a bounty of opportunities to live a healthier lifestyle. For those who live in northern states, the return to warm weather allows you to spend more time outdoors experiencing the mental and physical benefits of being in nature, getting more exercise and socializing safely. So grab your hat and sunglasses, drink plenty of water, and most of all, enjoy the summer!

Sources

https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin/basic_info/sun-safety.htm

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/hot-weather-safety-older-adults>



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IPRO Healthy Insights is authored by Dr. Clare Bradley, IPRO's Senior Vice President/Chief Medical Officer, a nationally recognized public health advocate.

IPRO is a non-profit organization that works with government agencies, providers and patients to measure and improve healthcare for all. For over 35 years we've made creative use of clinical expertise, emerging technology and data solutions to make the healthcare system work better.