



SENIORCARE OPTIONS

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**Candor. Compassion.
Competence.**

Aging Life Care Management
for the Metro Atlanta Area
Assisting medically frail seniors,
disabled adults, & their caregivers



Heat Stress: Realities, Reasons, and Risks

It's Summer finally! And, it's HOT! And, for many this means increased time outside to enjoy the weather. When this happens, we are often unknowingly activating our body's natural thermostat to keep at the optimal 98.6 degrees. So, how does this work exactly and why might I be concerned?

Deep within our brains is a portion called the Hypothalamus. It's a tiny almond-sized part – however, plays a host of very important roles including keeping the body in homeostasis (which means internal balance) for sustaining life by controlling our heart rate, body temperature, fluid/electrolyte balance, appetite/body weight, and sleep cycles. Regarding temperature, it balances our heat production, heat loss, and keeps the body at the temperature most appropriate for optimal functioning.

The weather's heat index is a noted quantity expressing the discomfort felt due to the combined effects of temperature and humidity. Risks for heat stress are greater at a heat index of 90 and above. As the heat index climbs – the Hypothalamus activates to respond to internal and external stimuli. It is alerted to assess and balance a very critical set of tasks – including the balance of body fluids, maintenance of salt concentrations, and the control of a set of hormones related to temperature control. Messages are sent to the blood vessels to dilate (become more open) which sends warm blood, salts, and fluids to the skin – which we know as sweating. When the sweat evaporates, our body is cooled.

This natural cooling process is less effective and efficient at both ends of the age spectrum – as when we were babies and as we age beyond 65. When the heat is extreme, when we are dehydrated, and/or when we take medications that interfere with this process – we are at a much greater risk of heat illness. Our body temperature will soar and the most extreme result is a life-threatening or permanently disabling illness called Heat Stroke.

Health conditions such as being obese or underweight, high blood pressure, diabetes, mental illness, alcoholism, heart disease, lung diseases, or kidney diseases also place one at a higher risk. Taking medications such as antidepressants, antihistamines, anticholinergics, beta blockers, and diuretics can also increase risk (many more not listed – please ask your doctor and pharmacist for further details).

The most frequently observed warning signs of Heat Stroke:

- Extremely high body temperature (above 103 degrees)
- Red, hot, dry skin (often without sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache, dizziness, and/or nausea

If you notice someone with the following symptoms, call 911 – as a delay in treatment can be fatal!

While waiting, do what you can to cool the person by: moving them inside or to a shady area, wet their skin with cool water, and (if possible) apply ice packs to their armpits, groin, neck, and back (as these are areas rich with blood vessels very close to the skin). Ask for further instructions from the 911 Dispatcher until help arrives.

Please keep an eye on those under your care for presenting symptoms, encourage increased fluids (asking their doctor, how much if on fluid restriction due to various conditions), recommend avoiding strenuous activities, and encourage spending time in air-conditioned locations when heat is most intense (between 3pm and 6pm) and in shaded areas when sun is most intense (between 10am and 2pm).

Resources Available

CDC – Warning Signs and Symptoms of Heat Related Illness

<http://www.cdc.gov/extremeheat/warning.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/extremeheat/seniors.html>

Support Group Information

Lacy Doremus, LMSW, C-ASWCM, facilitates a monthly caregiver support group at 7pm at Presbyterian Village - conference room between Hearthstone and Wellness center. The address is 2000 E West Connector Austell, GA and meetings are held the last Tuesday of each month at 7pm.

About SeniorCare Options

SeniorCare Options provides Certified Aging Life Care Management throughout the Metro-Atlanta area. Our team consists of Master's level clinicians in the fields of counseling, social work, therapeutic recreation, and registered nursing. Our backgrounds are vast and specific to the current clinical needs of our clients and their families who may be in transition, have chronic or difficult-to-manage conditions, and who require increased guidance. Our interdisciplinary focus, extensive experience, and heightened sensitivity to their specific needs prove to be an invaluable asset to families faced with the maze of options and care needs. **For more information** regarding Aging Life Care Management services, our support groups, or to inquire about requesting services for someone under your care, **please contact us at: 770-579-9177 or brandih@seniorcareopt.com.**