

## Health

### Helping homebound seniors stay safe in the heat

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By Constance Washington, RN, VNSNY Choice Health Plans

**I**t's July and the summer's extreme heat is about to kick temperatures up a notch. When that happens we all need to keep a few important guidelines in mind.

Oppressive humidity combined with temperatures in the high 80s and low 90s puts older and more vulnerable New Yorkers at increased risk of heat-related health issues. Many elders may not realize the dangers that can arise upon stepping out into hot weather unprepared. When taking into consideration additional factors such as air quality and cloud cover, temperatures can often feel much hotter than they actually are, posing hazardous conditions for those already at elevated risk of health problems.

Now more than ever, it makes sense to stay mindful of hot weather health cautions. My colleagues and I at VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans coordinate care for homebound seniors so they can live safely and independently in their own homes for as long as possible. Because the weather may slow down or prevent friends and family from visiting homebound seniors, it is important to ensure that they are safe and comfortable at home amidst high temperatures.

Below are a few easy ways in which New Yorkers—old and young alike—can stay feeling their best as they brave the heat.

#### Drink up

One of the most important

ways to maintain health during the summer is by drinking enough fluids to avoid dehydration. Drink plenty of water and eat foods containing water, such as fruits, vegetables, gelatin (Jell-O) and ice pops. Aim for 6 to 8 glasses of fluid a day (this amount includes the water in foods). Beware of coffee, caffeine and alcohol, which can actually dehydrate, rather than replenish, the body of fluids.

#### Keep a healthy appetite

Though your appetite may decrease in summer months, it is important to continue to eat well. Be sure your daily meals contain protein (lean meats, like chicken and fish) and carbohydrates (vegetables and whole grains). Salad, fruit and other small, cool meals can be eaten throughout the day to maintain strength.

#### Cool down the body

Take cool baths and showers to keep your body temperature from rising too high (Be sure that the bathtub has a slip-resistant mat or safety bars to help with transfers and prevent slips and falls). Simply cooling the feet in a bowl of cold or iced water may also help sustain bring your temperature down. Having a damp cloth to wipe down your face and arms is convenient as well.

#### Seek out cool places

Visit your local library, shopping center, movie theater, community center, or anyplace with air conditioning. New York City opens cooling centers in air-conditioned places like these when the weather is deemed dangerously high,

call 311 to locate your nearest cooling centers. You may also qualify for a free air conditioner through the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP); Call 1-800-692-0557 or 311 for more information.

Make sure you can get to important sites like the police station, fire station, pharmacy or hospital in case of emergency as well.

#### Consider a temporary care for an at-risk loved one

For elderly people who are home bound or living alone, regular visits from friends, family or caregivers offer welcome companionship when excessive heat outdoors forces you to stay inside for long periods of time. A home health aide can also be arranged for a few hours to provide peace of mind for family members who can't reach loved ones or check in when the heat is on to make sure they are getting fluids and staying safe at home.

#### Get it delivered

If possible, have something brought to your home rather than make the trek outside yourself. With many eateries offering delivery, and services like Postmates or Amazon Prime able to bring almost anything to your door, you can save yourself the trouble of carrying extra things around in the heat.

#### Skip the sun's peak hours

The hottest time of the day is between 10 AM and 2 PM. Avoid cooking or spending time outdoors during this period. If you must leave the house during a heat wave, wear sunscreen, as well as loose, light-colored clothing and a wide-brimmed hat. Always keep a fresh bottle of water in the refrigerator and bring it with you when you leave the house. Be careful to avoid burns on metal, especially on walkers, wheelchairs or benches.

Constance Washington, RN, is a Care Coordinator with VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans. To learn more, visit [www.vn-snychoice.org](http://www.vn-snychoice.org) or call 1-855-AT-CHOICE (1-855-282-4642).