

MANHATTAN VOICE

Hot Sidewalks, Heavy Air: How to Stay Safe This Summer



By Phil Leon, VNS Health Home Care RN, June 24, 2026

On a hot summer day in Manhattan, I feel the heat the same way many of my patients do: block by block. As a [VNS Health](#) home care nurse, I spend much of my day walking through Sutton Place and nearby neighborhoods with my nursing supplies in hand, visiting patients in their homes. I know which blocks have shade, where the breeze picks up near the East River, and how different the city can feel from one side of the street to the other.

Many of my patients live in tall apartment buildings and spend a lot of their day indoors, sometimes because of mobility challenges and often because of chronic conditions such as COPD, asthma or heart disease. But being inside does not always mean being protected. In summer, heat, humidity and poor air quality can affect people at home more than they realize.

Hot weather involves more than just discomfort. Heat exhaustion, heatstroke, dehydration and/or poor air quality put added strain on the body. For older adults and people with underlying health conditions, that strain can worsen existing problems and turn into a serious issue quickly.

The good news is that summer in Manhattan can be enjoyed safely with a little planning and preparation. Here are a few tips I often share with patients and caregivers.

When the Air Feels Heavy, Take It Easy

When checking the forecast, don't stop at the temperature. Humidity can make the air feel heavier and make shortness of breath worse, especially for people with asthma, COPD or heart failure.

Weather apps usually include updates on humidity and air quality. On days with high humidity or poor air quality, keeping your windows closed and using air conditioning, dehumidifiers, or HEPA air purifiers can help make indoor air more comfortable and easier to breathe.

A Little AC Can Go a Long Way

Many older adults feel cold more easily, so they may avoid using air conditioning even when their apartment becomes too warm. If you dislike cold air, try setting the air conditioner to a more comfortable temperature, such as 74 to 76 degrees, instead of turning it off completely.

Choose Shade Over Sun

Getting outside and staying active can be good for health and well-being, but summer is a good time to rethink routines. Try to avoid outdoor activity during the hottest part of the day, especially late morning through mid-afternoon.

In the city even the side of the street you choose can matter. Tall buildings may create shade on one block while the other side is in direct sun. And when you head out, be sure to bring water, wear loose and light clothing, or items made from moisture wicking materials to help your body cool down more quickly. And don't be afraid to take breaks!

Drink Before You're Thirsty

By the time you feel thirsty, your body may already be dehydrated. During hot weather, caregivers should watch closely for signs of dehydration such as dark or strong-smelling urine, dry lips, or unusual tiredness.

Drinking more does not have to mean downing plain water all day, which patients often tell me they don't enjoy. Try foods with high water content, such as cucumbers, watermelon or other fruits and vegetables, or slice them up and add to a pitcher of water for flavor.

Summer safety is also a neighborhood issue. If you have an older neighbor, relative or friend who lives alone, check in during heat waves, especially if they have breathing problems, heart disease or limited mobility. Being there for some of the most vulnerable in our community ensures we can all stay healthy. Summer heat can be challenging, but with planning and preparation, we can stay safer and make the most of the season.

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