

# Your Health Voice

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## HELPING ELDERS STAY COOL WHEN THE HEAT IS ON



**By Esther Conteh, RN, VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans, August 11, 2020**

August is heating up, and with all the stresses of the last few months from the coronavirus crisis, it is more important now than ever for New Yorkers to be mindful of some important health tips when it comes to beating the heat.

This summer, oppressive humidity, combined with temperatures in the high 80s and 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.

It makes sense to stay mindful of hot weather health cautions.



Esther Conteh, RN, VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans

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.

### **1. 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.

### **2. 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.

### **3. Cool down the body**

Take frequent 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 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.

### **4. Seek out cool places**

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, most of us are already staying indoors and social distancing. Keeping the blinds drawn so that hot sun doesn't make apartments even hotter is one strategy to consider. But for those at increased risk in extreme heat, New York City does open cooling centers in air-conditioned facilities for people experiencing physical discomfort in a heat wave. Visit <https://maps.nyc.gov/cooling-center/> to find a center near you. NYC also offers an Air Conditioner Program and you can dial 311 to learn more.

## **5. Consider temporary care for an at-risk loved one**

For elderly people who are home bound or living alone visits from a licensed [home health aide](#), wearing proper personal protective equipment and trained in safety protocols, 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.

## **6. Get it delivered**

If possible, have something brought to your home rather than cooking inside or making the trek outside yourself. With many eateries offering delivery these days, and services like Fresh Direct, Amazon and local grocery stores able to bring almost anything to your door, you can stay safe inside instead of carrying extra things around in the heat.

## **7. 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.

*Esther Conteh, RN, is Director of Utilization and Care Management with VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans, a part of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York. To learn more, please visit [www.vnsnychoice.org](http://www.vnsnychoice.org) or call 1-855-AT CHOICE (1-855-282-4642).*