

Beat the Heat!

Dehydration – the facts for YOU, Your Family, Your Parents!



Dr. Larry Lake is a licensed psychotherapist and the CEO of BayView, as well as its parent organization, the St. Johns Welfare Federation. Lake says “as a local non-profit healthcare provider,

we are excited about how this FORUM can help share the knowledge and expertise of the more than 275 healthcare professionals at BayView and across our continuum of care. In each issue we will address an area of interest to help consumers be even more informed about their health and wellness.”

This FORUM focuses on summer heat, dehydration, hyperthermia and its effect on those 50 years of age and older. Dehydration is a frequent cause of morbidity and mortality in elderly people. It causes the hospitalization of many patients and its outcome may be fatal. Our daily

fluid consumption is mainly stimulated by thirst. Science has shown that the thirst sensation decreases with aging, thereby increasing risk for dehydration, hyperthermia and other medical complications. This issue will also provide simple tools for prevention.

Lauri Martinez RN, BSN, is the Director of Nursing for BayView Home Health. She answers many important questions in this FORUM helping us to better understand the interaction between summer heat, inadequate hydration, its health implications on you, your parents and your elderly neighbors.

When dehydration combines with a rise in body temperature hyperthermia can result. Persons over the age of 50 are more susceptible to hyperthermia for many reasons.

What is Hyperthermia?

Hyperthermia is a condition where a person experiences an increase in body temperature due to the body's inability to dissipate heat. Hyperthermia is brought on by prolonged exposure to high temperatures without any cooling down periods. It can place a person at risk for serious and potentially life-threatening illness. In a 2006 review, the Centers for Disease Control found that of 3446 heat-related deaths, 60% were over the age of 50. Heat waves are said to cause more deaths than lightning, rain, tornados, hurricanes and flood, combined.

Water is essential to human life. It forms the basis for all body fluids, aids in the transportation and absorption of nutrients and it helps eliminate waste. Every day you lose more than 10 cups (close to 2.5 liters) of water simply by sweating, breathing and eliminating waste. You also lose electrolytes — minerals such as sodium, potassium and calcium that maintain the balance of fluids in your body. Normally, you can replenish what you've lost through the foods and liquids you consume. When you eliminate more water and salts than you replace, dehydration results — your system literally dries out.

Heat Stroke is a medical emergency and can be life threatening. Signs and symptoms include:

- **Body temperature greater than 104 degrees Fahrenheit**
- **Fainting**
- **A change in behavior, such as confusion, irritability, staggering or usual behavior**
- **Dry flushed skin and a strong rapid pulse or a slow weak pulse**
- **Not sweating in heat**
- **Acting delirious**
- **Unresponsiveness**

Treatment by a physician is imperative in addition to seeking out a cool location.

Health & Medicine

Identifying Hyperthermia

● **Heat cramps** - tightening of stomach, arm, and/or leg muscles, usually as a result of exercise and/or hard work. The skin may remain moist and cool, while the pulse and body temperature remains normal. Drink plenty of fluids to cool the body down. Exclude caffeine and alcohol.

● **Heat edema** - swelling in the ankles and feet when the body becomes overheated. Elevating your legs will generally alleviate this symptom quickly. If ineffective, notify your physician as soon as possible.

● **Heat syncope** - sudden dizziness that arises when you are active in the heat. Putting your feet up and relaxing in a cool place usually alleviates this symptom.

● **Heat exhaustion** - occurs when your body becomes unable to keep itself cool. Symptoms include feeling thirsty, dizzy, weak, uncoordinated, nauseated and excessive sweating. The skin is typically cool and clammy. Pulse can be above 100 beats per minute while body temperature remains normal. Get to a cool place and drink plenty of fluids immediately. If ineffective, notify your physician right away.

Risk Factors

Those at highest risk for hyperthermia include persons over the age of 50; those living in homes without air conditioning and/or good air flow; those with limited ability to afford utility bills; those who don't drink enough fluids; those diagnosed with a chronic illness such as heart, lung, or kidney disease, hyperthyroidism, hypertension, diabetes or dementia; those who are overweight or underweight; those with alcoholism.

The surrounding area temperature outside or inside above 100 degrees Fahrenheit alone is not considered to be a significant risk factor for or



Lauri Martinez RN, BSN, is the Director of Nursing for BayView Home Health.

predictor of hyperthermia.

Medications such as those used to treat heart and blood pressure conditions, diuretics, sedatives and tranquilizers can make it harder for your body to cool itself through sweating. Thus, combinations of these medications can further increase risk for becoming overheated. Always consult with your doctor or pharmacist regarding both prescription and over-the-counter medications.

- Antihistamines - loratidine, diphenhydramine, fexofenadine, meclizine
- Blood pressure and heart medicines - amlodipine, diltiazem, labetalol, metoprolol, carvedilol, clonidine.
- Laxatives
- Antidepressants/antipsychotics - amitriptyline, imipramine, chlorpromazine, haloperidol
- Seizure medicines/anticonvulsants - phenytoin, valproic acid, phenobarbital, carbamazepine
- Water pills/diuretics - hydrochlorothiazide, furosemide, spironolactone
- Anticholinergics - hyoscyamine, oxybutinon
- Antidiabetics - glyburide, metformin, insulin

Reduce your risk of heat-related illness now!

Drink plenty of liquids, such as water or fruit and vegetable juices. At least eight glasses of fluids daily are needed to keep your body working properly. Limit your caffeine and alcohol intake, as these fluids deplete the body's fluid resources. Pay attention to weather reports; avoid elevated temperatures, humidity or air pollution. Wear lighter fabrics, such as cotton and lighter colors. Avoid excessive activity and crowded places when it is hot. And as always, consult your doctor for more information.

If you live in a home without fans or air conditioning, be sure to open windows at night on both sides of the building to create cross ventilation. Cover windows that receive direct sunlight using room darkening drapes or aluminum foil. Keep windows covered during the hottest part of the day and try to spend at least two hours a day in an air conditioned location such as, the mall, library, senior center, or a friend's home. Contact your local agency on aging to see if an assistance program is available to receive air conditioners or financial help to run your air conditioner. Have someone drive you to a cool place on hot days. Do not wait outside for a ride or the bus.

What to do if you become over-heated

Get out of the heat immediately and into a cool, preferably air conditioned place. Drink water, fruit and vegetable juices. Shower, bathe or sponge off with cool water. Lie down and rest. Seek medical attention if you don't cool down quickly.

Taking care of our local seniors and neighbors

While our life expectancy continues to lengthen with the emergence of new medicines, disease management and treatments, our society has seen families becoming

increasingly geographically separated. The nuclear family that lived together as they aged is becoming a memory of the past. More and more seniors are living in communities where they have no family. We all know someone (a neighbor, a church member) who is aging, living alone and that has no family nearby. Take this opportunity to say hello. Check on the condition of their home, see if their air conditioning is working, if their pantry is full, if the power is working and how they are doing in general. Take a moment to meet one of your senior neighbors and help them stay safe from the summer heat and heat-related illness. *NJ*

The St. Johns Welfare Federation is a private not-for-profit comprehensive continuum of healthcare provider founded in 1920. Our superior level of services includes short-term inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, skilled nursing (Samantha Wilson Care Center), BayView Home Health, and assisted living (Pavilion at BayView and Buckingham Smith) and the Emergency Charitable Assistance Program. Caring Hands - Caring Community is a separate 501(c)3 charitable organization founded in 2004 by our parent organization. It was formed to support the exceptional services and continuum of care provided to people in need of healthcare services and financial assistance.



Health & Wellness Forum

161 Marine Street
St. Augustine, FL
(904) 829-3475