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Preparing for the heat means taking a few protective measures to reduce the impacts.

Warmer weather usually signals summer has arrived. For most of us that is a welcome change from our rainy winter months. But when it is too hot people can suffer unpleasant consequences, especially older people. Preparing for the heat means taking a few protective measures to reduce the impacts.

In British Columbia, the temperatures in the summer have been rising for years. According to a report, Canada in a Changing Climate; Government of Canada “Western Canada is already on average one to two degrees warmer than it was in the 1940s”. They say that the rise in temperature increases the likelihood for extreme heat events like the heat dome experienced in British Columbia in 2021.

Heat exhaustion is the leading cause of weather-related deaths in Canada. Those particularly at risk for heat exhaustion are seniors who are aged 65 years or older, who live alone, who do not have access to air conditioning, and who may have pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or respiratory disease.

HealthLink BC says that “too much heat can be harmful to your health. Heat-related illness is the result of your body gaining heat faster than it can cool itself down. Heat-related illness can lead to weakness, disorientation, and exhaustion”.

When it is very hot and you feel any of the following symptom’s headache, dizziness, difficulty breathing, confusion and rapid heartbeat you likely have heat exhaustion. Other symptoms include skin rash, heavy sweating, extreme thirst, nausea or vomiting and muscle cramps.

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Older people are also at a higher risk of dehydration because as we grow older our bodies have less ability to hold on to water and to feel thirsty. It is recommended that we drink water (best form of liquid) throughout the day. It has been suggested that for a 150-pound person, about eight glasses of water should be consumed per day. We should also avoid sugary drinks and alcohol.

To prevent overheating, Health Canada recommends that you get out of the sun and head indoors where there is air conditioning and stay hydrated. Other simple strategies to beat the heat include dressing for the weather (wear protective, breathable, and light fabric), avoiding the direct sun, and wearing sunscreen.

If you don't have air conditioning at home, try to get out to cooling stations. On the North Shore, cooling stations are located at the North Vancouver City Library, Harry Jerome and John Braithwaite Recreation Centres and most grocery stores and malls. If you have an outdoor area, fill up a kiddie pool and sink your feet in, or indoors you could fill a large container with water and stick your feet in. Taking a cooling shower when you feel overheated feels great and cools you down.



Photo by mas_hha: www.pexels.com

While most days are fine to get out and enjoy the weather, on hot days avoid strenuous activity or aim for early morning or evening exercise when temperatures are lower. Keeping your house cool by closing curtains or blinds during the day to block out heat and using fans to help circulate air and create a cooling effect is another good strategy.

As the summer heats up take care of yourself - be heat smart and keep cool.

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