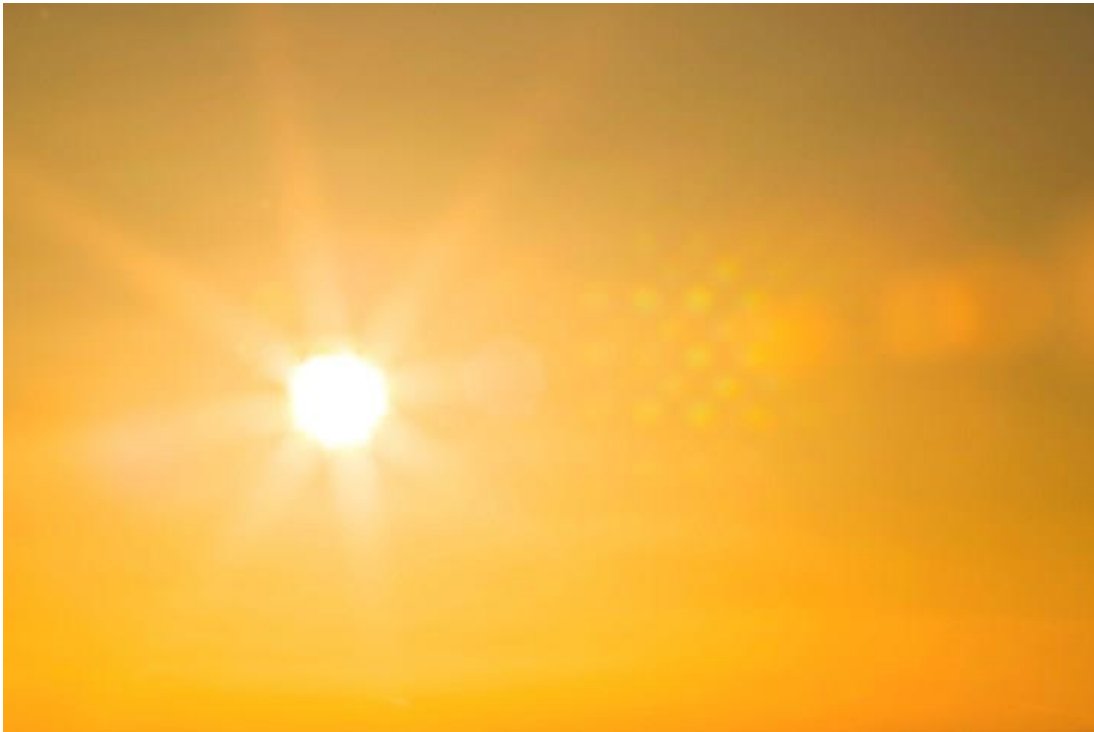


# Older and Wiser: It's essential for seniors to stay active, but that's complicated by a heat wave

Latest high temperatures not expected to be as severe as June spike, but caution still required  
July 30, 2021 By: Margaret Coates



*Residents are being told to check on family members and neighbours as temperatures rise again on the North Shore this weekend. Chuchart Duangdaw, Getty Images*

Staying active both mentally and physically is one of the top ways that older people can age well. But staying active at this time of year, especially during this dangerously hot summer on the North Shore, is a challenge.

Regular physical exercise is linked to healthy aging as it improves your balance, reduces falls, helps you stay independent longer and helps prevent disease such as stroke, osteoporosis, and Type 2 diabetes. Physical exercise is also linked to a decrease in the risk factors for dementia.

Exercising the brain is correlated to healthy aging as well. It is linked to physical mobility, stimulates our neural pathways, increases the quality of life, helps you stay connected to community and to stay independent. It can promote personal development and self sustainability. By keeping our minds active we can share ideas, develop our thinking skills, and improve our memories. Many brain exercise activities can be social such as playing a game with other people (bridge, anyone?) or participating in a book club. The social experience keeps you from becoming isolated. Being isolated for a senior, it has been said, is as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

But how do we get the physical exercise we need when recently our province has been experiencing a heat wave?

The heat wave has posed serious health and safety issues for seniors and in fact caused many heat-related deaths in the seniors' population. In the worst of the heat, it has been advisable to keep abreast of simple heat relief steps such as staying hydrated and cool, dressing for the weather, avoiding the direct sun, finding air-conditioned spaces like libraries, community, and recreation centres to hang out in, or mist cooling centres stationed across the North Shore, and curtaining some of your physical activities outdoors unless you choose the early morning.

However, getting exercise is important even in this weather. So, you could try getting out for walk which might mean getting up a little earlier or you could try going to the air conditioned indoor shopping centre for a mall walk.

I walked around the Maplewood Mud Flats Conservation Area, bounded mostly by the ocean, where it was shady and cool, with the extra delight in seeing various birds. Exercising by going for a swim adds the bonus of cooling you down. Or you could try an online exercise class held in the mornings before it gets too hot, like the [Keep Well class offered two times a week](#). If you go to one of the private gyms which are now open, make sure they have good air quality.

Though brain exercise can be easier in this weather, the heat can cause us to be sluggish in our thinking, perhaps dizzy, or feeling fatigued. Take the opportunity to get to an air conditioned space both to cool down and get some brain exercise. Go to the library, seniors, community, or recreation centres where they have more activities on offer now that COVID-19 restrictions are on the wane. See the [2021 Seniors Directory for a list of these organizations](#) or call them at 604-982-3302. Don't forget Elder College which has many classes on offer to challenge your brain.

On their website, the Alzheimer's Society states: "The brain is one of your most vital organs. It plays a role in every action and every thought, and just like the rest of your body, it needs to be looked after."

With all the best intentions in the world we sometimes need help in this weather. All older adult British Columbians can call the "Safe Seniors, Strong Communities" initiative, at 211, if they require help with groceries, water delivery, or a friendly check-in. Or closer to home, call [North Shore Emergency Management](#), at 778 -338-6300, or call one of the local seniors' centres who continue to offer many supports, such as food delivery, counselling, and telephone check ins, as they have throughout the pandemic.

I know I'm going to try hard to get my mental and physical exercise, but I'll keep in mind the heat smart tips for staying healthy in this heat wave. Now where's that water bottle, wide brimmed hat, and sunscreen?

*Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 51 years and has worked for and with seniors for 26 of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome – email [lions\\_view@telus.net](mailto:lions_view@telus.net).*