



Tips for Coping with Heat and Drought

Disasters create stress in our lives.

Drought stress may be different than stress in other disasters because a drought is an extended event and does not have a single moment of impact. The anxiety builds over time and becomes chronic, making it less noticeable to ourselves and those around us. The drought may not be viewed as seriously as a tornado because the damage is not as visible. Its impact is worsened for already stressed families and communities.

Signs of Stress

- Irritability and anger
- Feelings of anxiety and worry
- Headaches or gastrointestinal complaints
- Increased risk-taking behavior
- Changes in eating and sleep habits
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Forgetfulness
- Fatigue
- Sense of helplessness
- Lack of concentration
- Avoidance or denial
- Sadness

How to Deal with Stress

Families should remind themselves that these stress reactions are common and are normal responses to an unusual situation.

If stress goes unrecognized, it can affect our mental and physical health. If we learn to cope with stress, we can better face the challenges each day brings and can be even stronger when we face other difficult circumstances in life. Focusing on our own strengths and our community of support, we can take steps to help ourselves and our family:

- **Acknowledge and talk about feelings.** Family, friends and neighbors can be helpful listeners and may share some of the same

worries. Participating in church or spiritual renewal activities also can be sources of comfort and assistance in difficult times.

- **Eat healthy and get adequate sleep.** Engaging in recreation a favorite hobby or inside board games, getting away for a few hours with friends, reading a good book, volunteering to help others, and finding time to laugh can help.
- **Nurture personal relationships.** Couples should make time to be alone, to talk and have fun. Families should re-establish important rituals such as mealtimes and holiday celebrations. Children may need additional support — listen and be reassuring.

The good news is that, with time, we will return to what is normal or perhaps a “new” normal for us and our families.

When and Where to Seek Help

If stress, anxiety, depression or physical problems continue for more than a few weeks or if someone is having feelings of extreme hopelessness or extreme anger, talking about suicide or is violent, it is important to seek help immediately. Contact a physician or community mental health center as soon as possible.

For More Information, Contact:

Disaster Distress Helpline:

1-800-985-5990;

Text: ‘TalkWithUs’ to 66746

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available for you: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Missouri Department of Mental Health

Visit: www.dmh.mo.gov or

call 1-800-364-9687, 573-751-4122

University of Missouri Extension:

<http://extension.missouri.edu/>

What to Do During Extreme Heat

- **Check medications:** Some medications increase the effects of heat on your body and you may need to take extra precautions.
- **Slow down. Avoid strenuous activity.** Reduce, eliminate or reschedule strenuous activities. High-risk individuals should stay in cool places. Get plenty of rest to allow your natural "cooling system" to work. If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day, which is usually in the morning between 4:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. Many heat emergencies are experienced by people exercising or working during the hottest part of the day.
- **Avoid too much sunshine.** Sunburn slows the skin's ability to cool itself. The sun will also heat the inner core of your body, resulting in dehydration. Use a sunscreen lotion with a high sun protection factor (SPF) rating.
- **Postpone outdoor games and activities.** Extreme heat can threaten the health of athletes, staff, and spectators of outdoor games and activities. Bring out the inside games.
- **Avoid extreme temperature changes.** A cool shower immediately after coming in from hot temperatures can result in hypothermia, particularly for elderly and very young people.
- **Stay indoors as much as possible.** If air conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor, out of the sunshine. Even in the warmest weather, staying indoors, out of sunshine, is safer than long periods of exposure to the sun.
- **Keep heat outside and cool air inside.** Close any registers that may allow heat inside. Install temporary reflectors, such as aluminum foil covered cardboard, in windows and skylights to reflect heat back outside.
- **Conserve electricity not needed to keep you cool.** During periods of extreme heat, people tend to use a lot more power for air conditioning. Conserve electricity not used to keep you cool so power can remain available and reduce the chance of a community wide outage.
- **Vacuum air conditioner filters weekly during periods of high use.** Air conditioner filters can become clogged or filled with dirt, making them less efficient. Keeping them clean will allow your air conditioner to provide more cool air.
- **If your home does not have air conditioning, go to a public building with air conditioning each day for several hours.** Air conditioned locations are the safest places during extreme heat because electric fans do not cool the air. Fans do help sweat evaporate, which gives a cooling effect.
- **Dress appropriately:**
 - **Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing that will cover as much skin as possible.** Lightweight, light-colored clothing reflects heat and sunlight and helps maintain normal body temperature. Cover as much skin as possible to avoid sunburn and over-warming effects of sunlight on your body.
 - **Protect face and head by wearing a wide-brimmed hat.** A hat will keep direct sunlight off your head and face. Sunlight can burn and warm the inner core of your body.
- **Drink plenty of fluids even if you do not feel thirsty.** Injury and death can occur from dehydration, which can happen quickly and unnoticed. Symptoms of dehydration are often confused with other causes. Persons who have epilepsy or heart, kidney, or liver disease; who are on fluid-restrictive diets; or who have a problem with fluid retention should consult a doctor before increasing liquid intake.
- **Take frequent breaks if you must work outdoors.** Frequent breaks, especially in a cool area or to drink fluids, can help people tolerate heat better.
- **Use a buddy system when working in extreme heat.** Partners can keep an eye on each other and can assist each other when needed. Sometimes exposure to heat can cloud judgment. Chances are if you work alone, you may not notice this.
- **Drink plenty of water regularly and often.** Your body needs water to keep cool. Water is the safest liquid to drink during heat emergencies.

- **Avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine in them.** They can make you feel good briefly, but make the heat's effects on your body worse. This is especially true about beer, which actually dehydrates the body.
- **Eat small meals and eat more often.** Large, heavy meals are more difficult to digest and cause your body to increase internal heat to aid digestion, worsening overall conditions. Avoid foods that are high in protein, such as meats and nuts, which increase metabolic heat.
- **Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.** Salt causes the body to retain fluids, resulting in swelling. Salt affects areas of your body that help you sweat, which would keep you cool. Persons on salt-restrictive diets should check with a physician before increasing salt intake.
- **NEVER leave children or pets alone in closed vehicles.** Temperatures inside a closed vehicle can reach over 140 degrees F within minutes. Exposure to such high temperatures can kill in minutes.

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