

Beat the Heat and Survive the Summer

By Paul Purcell

The “Dog Days” of summer are almost upon us and record temperatures are sweeping the country. Unfortunately we have the highest number of elderly and medically fragile people in history, and an aging infrastructure that is feeling the strain of heavy electrical use as our senior citizens struggle to stay cool.

We’re here to give you tips and tricks to help you beat the heat should you be susceptible to extreme temperatures, or should your power be out. Here’s a short list of suggestions:

1. **Drink plenty of cool water** to keep yourself hydrated and reduce your body’s core temperature. (Warm water won’t do this, and cold water might be a shock to sensitive systems.) Drink regularly, every hour, even if you don’t feel thirsty. Avoid soft drinks and alcoholic drinks that are actually diuretic and rob your body of the water it desperately needs.

2. **Eat small, light, non-spicy meals.** Eating heavy meals cranks your metabolism and can raise your body temperature. Also, digestion robs you of energy. Since the heat is already robbing you of some energy, you don’t need to add to this drain by taxing the digestive system. However, don’t skip meals since it’s food that replenishes the electrolytes you lose through sweating and increased water consumption.

3. Some sources suggest you wear “light colored, loose fitting clothes” in hot weather. However, that’s only if you’re going outside. If you go outside, go with that rule and also wear a loose fitting hat or carry an umbrella for shade. Forget the fashion rules, follow the heat rules. (By the way, royal blue and/or white are the best colors to wear for their heat reflective qualities. This is why most tarps and boat awnings are blue.) For indoors, forget the clothing rules and go with the “**bare as you dare**” notion. The more exposed skin you have the more efficient your cooling-by-sweating process can work. Also, be sure to tie up long hair, and if you have a beard, consider shaving in order to remove all that facial insulation. When you do have to go outdoors, limit or schedule your physical activity. For example, if you have to do yard work, do it early in the morning or in the evening when it’s cooler. Too, consider the fact that the “siesta” concept is a pretty good idea. Rest and take it easy during the hotter hours of the day.

4. Though “bare as you dare” is the way to go indoors in limited AC, most of us would prefer to have good air conditioning. If yours is out, or if power sources are uncertain, **go someplace that has AC** like the mall or other places that don’t mind people coming in and hanging around a while. Also, you can “AC pool” with friends just like you’d car pool. Go to a friend’s house who has a good AC system.

5. Failing to find another source of AC, and considering that the power might be out, here are a couple more tips. First, **stand-alone floor unit air conditioners** aren’t that expensive and can run off regular household current without the need for the special 220 volt outlets. This means that they can be operated using the smaller gas-powered electric generators. Can’t afford a generator? You can probably afford a power inverter which can sometimes be found for under twenty dollars. They plug into your car’s cigarette lighter and, using an extension cord, can power an appliance like your stand-alone AC, or at least some fans. Speaking of your car, if nothing else, if your car has AC you can ride around during the hottest hours of the day, providing you can afford today’s gas prices. If absolutely nothing else, go to your nearest “dollar store” and see if they have any of those little battery-powered fans.

6. Can’t afford a stand-alone AC but you have a generator? Your generator or power inverter can also power your fridge and/or freezer where you should have **two-liter plastic bottles full of water** filling up every empty space in both the fridge and freezer. It makes the appliance run more efficiently and having cold water is a great thing. You drink cool water and use cold water to soak towels to wrap around your neck, wrists, and ankles where the veins and arteries are closest to the surface. This is one of the best ways to reduce your body temperature. Also, setting up a few of the frozen

two-liter bottles in front of a fan can blow a nice cool breeze your way. (Write us at info@disasterprep101.com and we'll email you instructions for a homemade AC unit that uses these two-liter plastic bottles.)

7. Now let's backtrack a bit and talk about reducing the heat you might experience. Naturally, the first rule is "**block the sun.**" Do what you can to reduce the sunlight that hits your house or comes in through the windows. Keep the shades drawn, and you might even consider hanging a white sheet or blue tarp as an outside awning on the side(s) of the house that catch the most sun. These tarps are also effective if placed on the roof as they'll reflect the sun's rays. These same rules apply to your car while you're out and about. Park in the shade where you can, and use sun screens (window shades) to help keep your car cool.

8. Next in cooling the house come **ventilation and insulation**. If you have an attic, and the power is on, you should have a vent fan that keeps air flowing through the attic. Along with that, we suggest you have roof vent turbines, or a ridge vent (your home supply store can tell you all about these). In extremely hot weather, you might set a garden sprinkler on your roof and let it run for the hottest couple of hours of the day provided your area is not on water restriction. As for "insulation" one way to insulate parts of the house is to close off seldom-used rooms (especially those on the sunny side of the house), and close off their AC vents if any. This blocks heat and also reduces the area that your limited AC has to cool.

While we're here, we'd be remiss in our duties if we failed to give you the **symptoms of sunstroke and heat exhaustion**, both of which require medical attention:

Heat Exhaustion: Symptoms include heavy sweating, and skin may be pale, cool, or flushed. The victim will also exhibit a weak pulse, with fainting, dizziness, nausea, or vomiting.

Sun Stroke: (sometimes called heat stroke): Symptoms are high body temperature, hot, dry, red, skin (usually with no sweating), rapid shallow breathing, and a weak pulse. Sun stroke is the more dangerous of the two.

The most immediate first aid for either of these is to get the victim into a cool spot, and reduce their body temperature with ice-cold wet towels around the neck, wrist, and ankles. You can also put them in a bathtub of cool water. Don't use cold water in the tub as that will shock the system. Regardless of your first aid measures, you should **seek immediate medical assistance**.

Remember, hot weather is nothing to ignore, even if you're not among the elderly or medically fragile. Heat can affect everyone. Play it safe, stay cool, avoid exertion, and stay healthy. Also, when considering heat safety, don't forget your pets.

Copyright 2006 - 2007, Paul Purcell. About the author: Paul Purcell is an Atlanta-based security analyst and preparedness consultant with over twenty years risk management and preparedness experience. He's also the author of **Disaster Prep 101** found at www.disasterprep101.com, and he's a partner / advisor to 1-800-PREPARE found at www.1800PREPARE.com.

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