

The British summer is here, with all its unpredictable glory. We're always on the look out for forecasts of hot weather to bask in, but it also carries a risk to health, particularly for the very young and elderly. In the event of hot weather, here's some advice about what a heatwave is and how to enjoy the sun safely.



Safe summer: protect yourself in hot weather.

Hot and sunny weather is a good thing to enjoy, but it can be dangerous if you don't take steps to protect yourself.

The term heatwave is used often, particularly in the media, when warm weather is forecast. An official heatwave, which is where you might need to take steps to protect yourself or look after others, is declared when temperatures reach 30 degrees centigrade during the day and 15 degrees at night. Make sure you keep an eye on the [weather forecast](#).

Heat can be dangerous, particularly for older people, the very young and those with serious

illnesses. It can make heart and respiratory problems worse and in extreme circumstances can lead to heat stroke, which can be fatal.

Stay safe in the sun

The sun's rays can be harmful, even in the UK. During a heatwave, you can take steps to make sure you still enjoy the benefits of the summer, but don't cause long-term harm:

- Stay out of the sun in the hottest hours, between 11am and 3pm.
- If you have to go out in the heat, walk in the shade, apply sunscreen with high sun protection factor and wear a hat and light scarf.
- Avoid extreme physical exertion.
- Wear light, loose-fitting cotton clothes.
- Check up on friends, relatives and neighbours who may be less able to look after themselves.

Cool yourself down

Keeping cool is another good way to protect yourself in hot weather:

- Drink plenty of cold drinks, but avoid too much tea, coffee and alcohol.
- Eat cold foods, particularly salads and fruit with a high water content.
- Take a cool shower, bath or body wash.
- Sprinkle water over the skin or clothing, or keep a damp cloth on the back of your neck.
- Plan ahead to make sure you have enough supplies, such as food, water and any medications you need.

In the home

Being indoors doesn't always help you escape from the effects of the heat. Here's how to make sure your home provides relief:

- Shut windows and pull down the shades when it is hotter outside. If it's safe, open them for ventilation when it is cooler.
- Keep rooms cool by using shades or closing curtains.
- Identify the coolest room in the house so you know where to go to keep cool.

Contact your doctor or a pharmacist if you have any unusual symptoms during a heatwave, especially if you are taking medication.

Watch out for cramp in the arms, legs or stomach, feelings of mild confusion, weakness or problems sleeping. If you do have these symptoms, rest for several hours, keep cool and drink plenty of water or fruit juice.

Seek medical advice if any of these symptoms get worse or do not go away.

But also make sure you enjoy the summer. There's benefits to your wellbeing and soaking in some vitamin A is a good thing.