



MENTAL ILL HEALTH AND EXTREME HOT WEATHER

Our climate is changing. In the UK, this means we are seeing more frequent bouts of severe weather.

Extreme hot weather is an average temperature of 30°C+ by day and 15°C+ overnight. It can be unpredictable and severely affect your life.

If you experience mental ill health, you need to take extra care of your health and wellbeing in extreme hot weather.

One way to adapt to climate change is to know how to look after yourself and others in the heat. Read our tips inside then identify your needs, such as adaptations to your home or routine, useful phone numbers and local support services.



Your health comes first

- There is increased risk of dehydration, overheating and accidents in extreme hot weather. Alongside this, exposure to heat and direct sunlight can make symptoms of mental ill health worse, such as mood and energy levels.
- In extreme hot weather, stay out of the heat and direct sunlight, particularly if you are experiencing mental ill health or side effects of medication.
- Always contact your doctor if you feel mentally or physically unwell. Exposure to extreme heat can cause dehydration, dizziness, headaches, changes to breathing, changes to heart rate and blood pressure, nausea, vomiting or cramps.
- Ensure you have adequate supplies of medication if extreme hot weather is forecast. If unpredictable extreme hot weather results in you being short of medication, speak to your support worker or doctor straight away.
- Extreme hot weather can increase the risk of forgetting to take medication. A pill box can help to remember each dose; these are available from chemists.
- Check storage conditions for prescribed medication – many advise to avoid direct sunlight and hot spaces. Avoid storing medication close to your body.
- If extreme heat stops you going to recovery groups, call peers for support.
- If you cannot avoid going out in extreme heat, stick to shaded areas. Take a refillable water bottle with you to keep hydrated and assist with taking prescribed medication. If you feel hot, seek out air-conditioned, cool public spaces such as shopping malls, supermarkets and community buildings.
- Don't go swimming to cool down if you are feeling mentally or physically unwell – risk of drowning is much higher if you do not feel well.



Food and drink

- If you are dehydrated, symptoms of mental ill health and side effects of medication can be more severe – take in cool non-alcoholic fluids such as water or fruit juice.
- DO NOT drink very large quantities of water too quickly to rehydrate – little and often is best, throughout the day.
- Eat regular light meals with high water content – salad, fruit, vegetables, cold soup.
- Make and consume food and non-alcoholic fluids at the best times for you – it's better to eat and drink when it suits you than not all



Money matters

- Keep an emergency fund for extreme hot weather.
- Prioritise funds in extreme heat to pay for food, non-alcoholic drinks, clothes, electricity, gas and phone.



Dress to keep cool

- Wear loose, cotton, light-coloured clothes.
- If you have to go out, wear a lightweight hat or scarf, sunglasses and sunscreen. Some medications have a side effect of increasing skin sensitivity to sunlight, meaning a higher risk of sunburn. Check with your doctor or read medication advice. Avoid direct sunlight whenever possible.
- Wear well-fitting sandals rather than flip-flops to reduce risk of accidents or injury.



Keep cool indoors

- Pull blinds or curtains on sun-facing windows.
- If it's safe, open windows when it cools down to ventilate.
- Keep a spray bottle of water in the fridge to cool your face.
- If you are experiencing mental ill health or side effects of medication:
 - Cool down by wiping a lukewarm wet cloth / sponge against your skin.
 - DO NOT take a cold shower or bath, which may shock your system.
 - Take care operating electric fans.



If you are homeless

- DO NOT sit out or sleep in direct sun. Seek out shade or go indoors. quicker in extreme heat and can lead to poisoning.
- Find sources of clean water to drink at community facilities and shelters.
- Take extra care with food you are given or you find – food spoils much quicker.
- Wash feet regularly to avoid infection, particularly if you wear the same footwear everyday.



Keep in touch and informed

- Isolating in extreme heat can make symptoms of mental ill health worse. Keep in daily contact with friends, family and support workers.
- Turn on the TV or radio to find out weather reports.
- Look out for people who are vulnerable. Can you think of anyone who may need a supportive phone call or message?
- Find out about help to keep cool and well from community / faith groups.



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To keep yourself safe and well in extreme weather, check out the full series of advice leaflets from Equinox:

- Alcohol and extreme cold weather
- Drugs and extreme cold weather
- Mental ill health and extreme cold weather
- Alcohol and extreme hot weather
- Drugs and extreme hot weather
- Mental ill health and extreme hot weather

**To download and share electronic copies,
please visit: www.equinoxcare.org.uk/climate-change**

These guides have been developed by Equinox with funding from Defra. The content is based on the experiences of Equinox service users with expert guidance from Equinox medical professionals.