



# **Volunteer Leader Training Guide**

## **Dr. Traywick's Top Ten Tips for Senior Summer Safety**

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### **Introduction**

Summer is a great time for fun, vacation and play. Unlike the lazy days of summer many of us remember growing up, summer is a time for nonstop activity. We/Senior Adults get swept up in the hustle and bustle of summer activity, even when retired, due to such means as watching our grandchildren, church group trips and civic club activities. Although summer is a time for carefree fun, we still need to be safe and protective of our health.

### **Target Audience**

- EHC Clubs
- Senior Adult Small Groups

### **Objectives**

The following ten tips for Senior Summer Safety are common sense reminders of warnings that prevent illness and keep us healthy. Participants will learn why it's important to adopt summer safety measures.

### **Materials Needed**

- Display posters (Ask county agent to check out from LRSO)

### **Suggested Use**

The display posters are designed so that EHC clubs can teach the educational lesson without the use of PowerPoint. The teaching tips are on the back of each of the posters. Hold up the poster, read or summarize the information on the back and proceed to the next poster.

### **Summer Safety Tips**

1. **Drink Water.** It is super important to stay hydrated, especially in summer months when it is hot. Water makes up about 70 percent of our body weight and is essential for many of our body functions, ranging from maintaining body temperature to transporting vitamins and minerals.

As we age, we become more susceptible to dehydration for several reasons:

**Decreased thirst:** Our sense of thirst declines as we age. Our need for water does not. The exact reason for this is still unknown. Researchers have figured out that the hypothalamus in the brain is the body's thirst center, but they are still trying to discover how it all works.

**Medications:** Side effects of medicines can also cause dehydration. The medicines could contain or have a side effect of being a diuretic, or they could cause excessive sweating. If you are unsure if your medication has a fluid side effect, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. If the directions to your medication say to take with 8 ounces of water, be sure you do so.

**Decreased kidney functioning:** After middle age, our bodies start losing kidney functioning, and our bodies are less able to conserve fluid. This is accumulative, and you probably won't notice it until you are 70s or so. But it is happening now if you are over 40. It is a natural part of aging.

That said, if you are having pain or burning during urination, blood in your urine or pain in your lower back around your kidneys – see your doctor as soon as possible. That is not normal aging and can indicate infection.

**Illness:** Vomiting and/or diarrhea can cause dehydration in anyone, regardless of age.

**What should senior adults do?** Drink *water*, not caffeine drinks – which are diuretics and bladder irritants. *Drink water.*

This tip is most likely one you have heard many times. Why did it make the top-ten list? It is extremely important to prevent dehydration in senior adults. Signs of dehydration in senior adults include confusion, difficulty walking, dizziness, headaches, dry mouth, inability to sweat or produce tears, rapid heart rate, low blood pressure, low urine, constipation and sunken eyes.

**The take-home message is to monitor your water intake and drink water even if you are not thirsty.**

- 2. Keep Cool.** Lower temperatures have been shown to increase life expectancy. Even small increases in body temperature can shorten the lifespan of senior adults who are fighting a chronic medical condition. When the body is too hot for too long, it can damage the brain and other internal organs.

**What to do?** Turn on your air conditioner and/or fans. If you do not have air conditioning, go to the movies, the mall, the library or church to find refuge in cooler spaces. Many senior adults want to save money and try to do so by not turning on the air conditioning – **let's save our health by keeping cool.**

- 3. Talk to Your Pharmacist.** First, about the effects your medicines have on you in the summer, and second, about the effects the summer has on your medicines. Some medications make you sensitive to sunlight and UV rays. Other medications make it harder to adjust internal body temperatures.

You need to know all the side effects of the medicines you are taking, but we sometimes neglect to read through the list the pharmacist gives us. In the summer, there is the special concern of sunlight and heat having interactions with your medicines.

It is not just medicines; many over-the-counter products may have labels to limit sun exposure after use. For example, some labels for citrus essential oils or beauty products with alpha-hydroxy acid say to stay out of the sun.

Just like the heat and sun may affect you, some medications lose their effectiveness if they get too hot. You should never store medicines where they will be exposed to extreme temperatures, moisture or excessive light. Some medicine labels specifically say to store in the refrigerator, but if that is not stated, don't store the meds in the refrigerator. Medications have a storage temperature range that is usually room temperature.

For example, aspirin pills are easily damaged by heat and moisture breaking them down to vinegar and salicylic acid.

Think about it. Where do we most often store our medicines? In the bathroom? In a cabinet by the stove? On the window sill? All those places will have temperature swings with increased moisture.

In the summer, be aware if you have to carry medicines with you in a pocket or purse. Don't leave them sitting in a hot car. If you need to, bring a cooler for the car.

As a side note, remove the cotton ball from your medicine bottles and throw it away. The cotton can absorb moisture, which will break down the medicines, but it will also collect germs off your hands every time you take it out and put it back in. Just throw it away. Do not save it for other uses – like makeup remover – it has residual medicine on it. Just throw it away.

- 4. Dress for the Weather** – including hats and sunglasses. Sunglasses protect your eyes from UV rays that are harmful to vision. Too much sun can also be irritating to your eyes, so protect them. In addition to sunglasses, wear a hat. A hat serves two purposes. It helps shield your eyes, and it also helps shield your face, neck and ears from the sun, which lessens your chances of sunburn and skin cancer.

Now that our heads are covered, consider the clothes you actually wear. Breathable clothing will keep you covered, protected from the sun and cool all in one. (No polyester double knits in the summer.) If you don't like the new synthetic blends, go with natural fabrics like a lightweight wool, cotton or linen. Long-sleeved shirts made of appropriate summer materials will not only protect you from the sun but will also help you feel cooler.

As you dress for the summer, be sure to layer your clothes. That way you can dress and undress with ease as the temperatures go up and down with the air conditioners in public places.

Don't forget your shoes when dressing for the summer. Flip-flops may be in style, but they are a fall hazard. If you want to wear sandals in the summer, choose those with walking support and back straps. When you wear sandals without socks, don't forget to apply sunscreen to your feet.

- 5. Sunscreen – Wear It. Apply Often.** There are many options available, so there is not an excuse for not wearing sunscreen. Find a brand or type that you will wear, and make it part of your getting ready routine.

All skin hues need sunscreen. Protect your skin. The darkening of the skin from the sun is skin damage, not a healthy glow.

In addition to sunscreen for your skin, use a lip balm with a SPF (sun protective factor).

- 6. Know the Symptoms of Heat-Related Illness.**

Hyperthermia is heat-related illness, and senior adults are at particular risk. Many of the those who die of heat-related illnesses, such as heat stroke, are over 50 years of age. There are several levels of heat-related illness:

- a. Heat stress occurs when a strain is placed on the body as a result of hot weather.
- b. Heat fatigue is a feeling of weakness brought on by high outdoor temperature. Symptoms include cool, moist skin and a weakened pulse. The individual may feel faint.
- c. Heat syncope is sudden dizziness after exercising in the heat. The skin appears pale and sweaty but is generally moist and cool. The pulse may be weakened, and the heart rate is usually rapid. Body temperature is normal.
- d. Heat cramps are painful muscle spasms in the abdomen, arms or legs after strenuous activity in the heat. The skin is usually moist and cool, and the pulse is normal or slightly raised. Body temperature is mostly normal. Heat cramps often are caused by loss of electrolytes due to sweating. People on salt-restricted diets may be at increased risk for heat cramps even without strenuous exercise.
- e. Heat exhaustion is a warning that the body is getting too hot. The individual may be thirsty, giddy, weak, uncoordinated, nauseous and sweating a lot. The body temperature is usually normal, and the pulse is normal or raised. The skin is cold and clammy. Heat exhaustion often is caused by the body's loss of water and salt.

- f. *Heatstroke* is life-threatening. An individual with heatstroke has a body temperature above 104°F. Other symptoms may include confusion, bizarre behavior, fainting, staggering, strong rapid pulse, dry flushed skin, lack of sweating, possible delirium or coma. Heatstroke may damage the kidneys, heart, lungs, muscles, liver, intestines and brain. Emergency medical treatment is necessary; call 911 immediately.

7. **Enjoy Outdoor Summer Activities – Get Outside!** Summer is a great time to get outside and walk, garden, swim, bike, hike, have a picnic...the list goes on and on. As much as the body needs to have sunshine to help set the body's circadian rhythm, be smart about it. Watch the clock to avoid the hottest hours of the day. Check the weather forecast. If there is a heat advisory, you may want to change your outdoor plans or adjust the times. When possible, do your outdoor activities in the shade.

We need sunlight to help combat depression and seasonal affective disorder by increasing levels of serotonin; help us sleep; make vitamin D, which will help the body absorb calcium and fortify bones; and clear some skin conditions such as eczema and acne. It's summer. Go outside and enjoy it. Reset your circadian rhythm. Just be smart about it.

8. **Have a Check-In Plan.** Increase your social circle. Meet your neighbors. Set up regular calls with a friend. Have a set time you call a relative. Many doctors recommend checking in twice a day during the summer months.

As important as it is to check in, it is just as important to know who to call if the person doesn't answer your check-in call. If you call your friend and they don't answer (and they don't answer, and they don't answer), what is your next step?

Let someone know if you are going to be outside for an extended period of time, gardening, watching grandkids or going for a walk, bike ride, etc. The first reason is that we won't worry about you. The second reason is that we can come check on you if you are not back in a reasonable amount of time.

9. **Home Safety – Poison Prevention.** There are many home safety tips for senior adults that range from installing nightlights to removing throw rugs. Poison prevention is a year-around topic, but some areas of concern are more common in summer months.

One of the most dangerous poisons is hydrocarbons. These include gasoline, lighter fluid, furniture polish, lamp oil, turpentine and paint thinner. Think about it. In the summer, there are gas containers for the lawn mower, the boat (if you're lucky) or other outdoor motorized "toys." We barbeque and use lighter fluid. It's time for spring cleaning, and we get out the furniture polish. We finally paint the garage (or hire someone to do it) because there is no chance of rain. These common fluids are super dangerous, so be aware of the dangers of inhalation as well as ingestion.

Some of the other most dangerous poisons found in or around the home include allergy medicines, cleaning products, windshield washer fluid, pesticides and wild mushrooms – all of which are used more/grow more in the summer months.

*What are the safety tips?*

Do not use food containers as storage for chemicals. For example, do not use an empty milk jug or soda bottle to store Windex® window cleaner. It looks just like Kool-Aid®.

Store gasoline only in approved containers.

Use safety locks on cabinets or storage buildings with chemicals.

Keep away from areas that have been recently sprayed with pesticides as pesticides can be absorbed through the skin.

When in doubt, call the Poison Control Center (1-800-222-1222).

- 10. Car Safety.** In the summer, there are issues that occur when driving that all drivers need to be aware of. We all hear about the dangers of driving on ice and snow, but there are dangers in summer as well.

Eyesight issues are a concern for older drivers no matter what the season, but in summer we need to take extra precaution. Some medications or medical conditions can affect your peripheral vision. In the summer months, there are more children outside playing. Not being able to see to our sides can cause us to miss a child or animal darting across the street.

Some individuals have extra sensitivity to light as they age. Sometimes this is from medication or medical conditions, but for anyone, the sun is just brighter in the summer. Wearing UV protection eyewear helps avoid damage to the eyes as well as enable better vision.

With the heat of summer and the asphalt of the road, there is the issue of haze on the road, which can contribute to blurred vision. A heat mirage that looks like water does not only happen in the desert.

Conversely to being too bright to see to drive in the summer, many of us have trouble seeing in the dark. One of the suggestions to stay cool is to do your outside activities in the morning – it is still dark in the cool of the morning. Be sure to take a flashlight on that morning walk, even though it will be full-daylight by the time you return.

*What to do?* Have your eyes checked annually, and keep your prescription up to date. Wear UV blocking sunglasses, not just dark lenses. Use preservative-free eye drops to keep your eyes moist and vision more clear.

Now that we can see or at least talked about vision, let's look at the car itself.

- **Check the air pressure in the tires.** Hot air causes gas to expand while cold air causes gas to contract. If you are not familiar with checking air pressure, have a professional do it for you. The correct tire air pressure for your vehicle is not the number listed on the tire itself but the label on the driver's doorframe or in the vehicle owner's manual.

- **Check belts and hoses for good condition and good fit.** High summer heat will speed up the rate at which rubber belts and hoses degrade.
- **Check your wiper blades for wear and tear.** After a winter of snow and ice, the abuse wiper blades took from poorly scraped windshields and driving in sleet shows up in the summer heat shower when they can't keep the windshield clear.
- **Check the coolant reservoir level to be sure it is full.** Antifreeze and water are not just for winter to keep the car from freezing, they are also to keep your car's engine cool in the summer.
- **Check your air conditioning in the car.** On hot summer days, the air temperature inside the car can get much hotter than the outside air. Your car actually acts as a greenhouse absorbing heat and trapping it inside. If your car's a/c is not working, have it fixed or get a ride.

Always wear your seat belt.

Car safety also includes being prepared if there is an accident or if you are stalled on the side of the road for some reason. Cars are more likely to overheat in the summer. Being on the side of the road or stuck on the interstate due to a large wreck are not planned activities. In the heat of summer, this is a huge concern.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (NHTSA) recommends that a car safety kit include: (<http://www.safercar.gov/summerdrivingtips> retrieved Feb. 9, 2016)

- Cell phone and car charger
- First aid kit
- Flashlight
- Flares and a white flag
- Jumper cables
- Tire pressure gauge
- Jack (and ground mat) for changing a tire
- Work gloves and a change of clothes
- Basic repair tools and some duct tape (for temporarily repairing a hose leak)
- Water and paper towels for cleaning up
- Nonperishable food, drinking water and medicines
- Extra windshield washer fluid
- Maps
- Emergency blankets, towels and coats

### **Bonus Tip: Avoid Mosquito Bites**

With the current publicity about potential Zika virus transmission and the upcoming mosquito season, we should not panic but learn more about mosquitoes and ways to avoid bites.

#### **Artificial Container Breeders**

The fact is that the potential carriers of Zika virus (the yellow fever mosquito, *Aedes aegypti*, and the Asian tiger mosquito, *Aedes albopictus*) do not breed in rice fields, swamps or floodwaters. They breed in artificial containers and are more closely associated with people and dwellings.

So, we know that getting rid of any containers that hold water outdoors is a good idea. These can be open trash cans, old tires, catch basins under potted plants and so forth. Flush bird baths daily so mosquitos don't have a chance to breed in the standing water. Don't forget to check and fix rain gutters so water does not stand in them. All sources of standing water should be eliminated if possible. Since these two mosquitoes have short flight ranges of less than ½ mile, elimination of standing water in containers can be very effective in helping control them.

### **Protecting Yourself From Mosquito Bites**

Insect repellents are the first line of defense against mosquito bites. Repellents containing DEET are effective at repelling mosquitoes. Other repellents that can be used to repel mosquitoes include picaridin and oil of eucalyptus. Wearing a long-sleeved shirt and long pants will also prevent mosquito bites. Gear and clothing can be also treated with clothing repellents that contain permethrin. Look for these repellent names in various products and follow the use label.

### **Reducing Mosquitoes Around the Home and Farmstead**

Specific insecticide use around the home can reduce biting mosquitoes. For example, application of insecticides on shrubbery can be very helpful. Usually, these are pyrethroid insecticides with residual activity. Some products are labeled for homeowner use, while others are only for professional applicators. Fogging with a low-toxicity, short-lived insecticide (pyrethrins, resmethrin, allethrin) is another option but provides only temporary (2-3 hours) control of mosquitoes flying or resting in the treated area. Fogging should only be used when mosquitoes are active, and peak activity often depends upon the species. Although most mosquitoes are active at dusk, dawn and at night, a few are active during the day, like the Asian tiger mosquito and the yellow fever mosquito.

### **Treating Mosquito Bites**

The likelihood of contracting a mosquito-borne virus in Arkansas is very slim. The first step in treating mosquito bites is to not scratch. If the itching is bothersome, apply hydrocortisone cream, calamine lotion or a cold pack.