

For Your Health:

Summer Health for Seniors

Nathan McLaughlin, Director of Consumer Assistance Programs

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The summer can be a wonderful time of year, but like any season, it comes with its own challenges. For instance, our recent experience of the weather in the Twin Counties reminds us that sometimes, the summer's heat and humidity can be pretty intense. Those very high temperatures are not just uncomfortable; they can also be a threat to our health by causing various heat-related illnesses such as dizziness, cramping, swelling, skin irritation, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

While high temperatures can be a health risk for people of all ages, older adults need to be particularly careful. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, older adults are more vulnerable to heat stress than younger people because age-related changes, such as reduced sweating and poorer circulation, can make it harder for their bodies to regulate temperature. Additionally, certain chronic health conditions that are more common in older adults can raise the risk of heat-related illness, as can certain medications such as diuretics, sedatives, and some heart and blood pressure medicines.

In order for older adults to stay safe and healthy this summer, they should focus on the "in and around." By "in" we mean what they are putting in their bodies—namely, fluids. Of course, seniors who have been told by their doctors to limit their fluid intake should consult with them about what to do in very hot weather, but for everyone else, the emphasis should be on drinking plenty of water, fruit or vegetable juices, and drinks with electrolytes and avoiding alcohol and caffeinated beverages. Moreover, seniors should focus on drinking not just when they feel thirsty—which is one of the first signs of dehydration-- but throughout the day to head that thirsty feeling off.

Seniors should also focus on the "around"—meaning the environment around their bodies. Ideally, seniors should seek air-conditioned spaces to ensure they keep themselves cool. If a senior's own home isn't cooled by air conditioning, it can still be kept cooler than outdoors by keeping windows closed and curtains drawn across them during the day, and open during the night. When temps get really high, seniors without air conditioning at home may need to find it in shopping malls, movie theaters, libraries, senior centers, or a friend's home in order to get necessary relief from the heat.

Furthermore, any cash-strapped senior who is worried about the cost of keeping cool should know that the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) includes Cooling Assistance for the purchase and installation of an air conditioner or a fan. The Columbia County Office for the Aging, which can be reached at (518) 828-4258, can assist seniors with accessing HEAP benefits.

Finally, it is important for seniors and the people who care for them to know the signs and symptoms of heat stress, such as headache, dizziness, confusion or nausea. Seniors living alone should find someone they trust to check on them regularly during hot weather.

While the summer can come with some challenges, it also comes with opportunities, and one of the best is the opportunity to eat fresh locally grown food! The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is designed to improve the nutrition of low-income seniors by providing coupons that can be used at participating farmers' markets. The Columbia County Office for the Aging, which can be reached at (518) 828-4258, has these booklets available for pickup.

There is also a fantastic opportunity for socializing this summer, when the Columbia County Office for the Aging hosts their 5th Annual Senior Day on September 12th, 2024 at the Stuyvesant Falls VFW from 12:30-2:30 pm. Staff from the Healthcare Consortium's NY Connects Program will be present at this event and is looking forward to meeting Columbia County's seniors at this very fun celebration!

NYConnects is a trusted source of information and assistance for any Columbia County resident needing long term care. Staff working in our NY Connects Program can offer information about services such as home care, transportation, and respite care, and help make the connections to them. At the Healthcare Consortium, we are NEVER the wrong door—we can always help--so if you have an unanswered question, or don't even know the "right" question to ask, never hesitate to contact us. We can help you to figure out the question, and then find the answer! Contact information for Columbia County NY Connects Program is (518) 828 CARE (2273) or toll free at 1-877-260-9244. You can also access our online resource directory at <https://nyconnects.ny.gov>.

The Healthcare Consortium is a non-profit organization with a mission of improving access to healthcare and supporting the health and well-being of the residents in our rural community. The agency is located at 325 Columbia St. in Hudson. For more information: visit www.columbiahealthnet.org or call 518-822-8820.