

Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke

NHS.UK (May 2026) | SAM Hot Weather Health Plan (2025) | UKHSA Hot Weather Guidance (2024)

■ 999: Call Immediately If

- Confusion, disorientation, agitation, or lack of coordination after heat exposure
- Seizure, loss of consciousness, or fast and laboured breathing
- Collapse with ongoing symptoms, inability to stand or mobilise safely, abnormal breathing, or any concern about safe transport
- Still unwell after 30 minutes of cooling, rest and fluids (all patients, including children under 5)
- Impaired swallowing with reduced consciousness, confusion, weakness, or aspiration risk: do not give oral fluids
- Hot, dry skin without sweating plus heat exposure (absent alone does not exclude heat stroke if other red flags are present)
- Suspected neuroleptic malignant syndrome: high temperature, muscle rigidity, confusion on antipsychotics
- Do not give paracetamol or ibuprofen. Do not drive. Do not advise the patient to drive themselves.

■ URGENT: ED Same Day or NHS 111

- [ED same day] Collapse or fainting fully resolved in a high-risk patient: frail older adult, cardiovascular or renal disease, diabetes
 - [ED same day] Frail older adult, pregnant patient, or child under 5 with mild improving symptoms but ongoing concern
 - [ED same day] Lithium or digoxin use with heat symptoms or dehydration; antipsychotic or anticholinergic use with significant heat symptoms
 - [ED same day] Swallowing difficulty without reduced consciousness: oral hydration is unreliable, clinical assessment needed
 - [NHS 111 or GP] Mild heat exhaustion improving but concern about diuretics, ACE inhibitors, ARBs, or SGLT2 inhibitors
- Do not give oral fluids if swallowing is impaired. Do not advise patients to stop prescribed medicines independently.

SWEAT: Heat Triage Framework

S	Sweating present?	Sweating with pale skin: heat exhaustion more likely. No sweating, hot dry skin: suspect heat stroke. Heat stroke can occur while still sweating if central nervous system signs are present.
W	Waited 30 minutes?	Cooling for 30 minutes with no improvement? Call 999 regardless of consciousness level.
E	Exposed to risk factors?	Over 65, under 5, pregnant, or on high-risk medicines: lower threshold for escalation at any stage.
A	Altered consciousness or coordination?	Confusion, disorientation, agitation, lack of coordination, or unresponsive: call 999 immediately.
T	Temperature above 40 degrees?	Strongly supports heat stroke with heat exposure or altered mental state. Do not wait for a temperature reading if red flags are present.

✓ SELF-CARE: All Criteria Must Be Met

- Fully conscious, orientated, no confusion, coordination normal, swallowing safely
- No high-risk medicines, no significant comorbidity, not pregnant, not under 5, not frail or socially isolated
- Symptoms present under 30 minutes and clearly improving
- Move to cool room, remove outer clothing, sip cool fluids, apply cool damp cloths to neck and armpits
- Do not use fans if room temperature is above 35 degrees Celsius

Key reminders: Confusion or lack of coordination after heat exposure means 999, even if still sweating. 30 minutes with no improvement means 999 regardless of consciousness. High-risk medicines: antipsychotics, anticholinergics, diuretics, ACE inhibitors, ARBs, SGLT2 inhibitors, lithium, digoxin. Do not give paracetamol or ibuprofen for heat stroke.