

Doctors' Voice

January/February 2013

Child safety – hot weather

Babies and young children should be watched during hot weather. They can quickly lose body fluids through perspiring, which can lead to dehydration. They need to drink regularly, wear light clothing and be kept cool.

Warning signs of dehydration may include:

- Child seems tired and lethargic
- Has sunken and dark eyes
- Is irritable or crying
- Has fewer wet nappies than usual
- Has hot, dry and coated-looking tongue and mouth
- Has a high temperature
- Vomits or has diarrhoea
- Is not eating or drinking

If you are worried that your child has one or more of these signs, take your child to a doctor or hospital

Heat stress and the elderly

Heat stress may affect older people more than others. Some people aged 65 years and over may be at increased risk of heat-related illnesses and need special care in hot weather. Risk factors include living alone, chronic medical problems and certain drugs. Heat stress is also known as hyperthermia.

Symptoms of heat stress may include:

- Hot and dry skin
- Paleness
- Rapid heart rate
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea and vomiting
- Disorientation and confusion
- Delirium
- Fainting or coma
- Worsening of pre-existing medical conditions.

If an elderly person seems to be suffering from heat stress, cool them down promptly and seek immediate medical help.

Source: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Bone density testing

Bone density testing is a medical procedure used to determine bone density or strength. It can identify osteoporosis (when bones become less dense, lose strength and break more easily due to calcium loss) or osteopaenia, a milder form of bone loss.

There are various different procedures that can measure bone density. The majority of these procedures are quick and pain-free. Dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) which uses a special x-ray scanning machine to measure bone density, is the most popular technique as it is fast and highly accurate. Another name for bone density testing is bone mass measurement.

When is bone density testing performed

Bone density testing is most often used when people have:

- Osteoporosis, or are postmenopausal and concerned about osteoporosis
- A spinal deformity
- Osteopaenia (decreased bone density)
- A previous fracture

Osteoporosis is common in the elderly, particularly females. Certain diseases and conditions can also contribute to bone loss, including endocrine (hormonal) disease, chronic liver disease, rheumatoid arthritis and chronic renal failure.

For further information make an appointment to discuss osteoporosis with your doctor or practice nurse.

Source: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

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Making the most of your medicines

If you or someone you care for takes medicines regularly, it's a good idea to have the medicines reviewed from time to time by your doctor or pharmacist. During a medicine review your doctor will look at each of your medicines and discuss them with you to make sure you're getting the best out of them. They will also consider whether any changes could be made that would improve your health and make it easier for you to manage your medicines.

For most people, the review will be yearly; however, for others it will be related to an event, such as:

- Being discharged from hospital-it's common to have your medicines changed when you're in hospital and you may even go home with new ones. It's important to discuss these changes with your regular doctor.
- Pregnancy-if you're considering starting a family, it's important to discuss any medicines you're taking
- Side effects-if you've experienced some unpleasant side effects that make it difficult to take your medicine, it's important to discuss them with your doctor or pharmacist.

If you've been taking the same medicine for a long time a review may be an opportunity to consider other factors, such as:

- Severity of your condition-your medicine may not be managing your condition as well as it once did
- Liver and kidney health- as we age the organs used to process medicines in our bodies don't work as well, so your dose may need to be adjusted
- Mixing medicines-if you're taking several prescription and non-prescription medicines, it's important to make sure they work well together. You may also find you don't need to take some of your medicines anymore.

Useful contact

Adverse Medicine Events (AME) Line

- 1300 134 237
- Monday to Friday 9am – 5 pm
- For reporting and discussing adverse experiences with medicines if you suspect that your medicine is causing a problem. Staffed by pharmacists from the National Prescribing Service (NPS).

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If you have any ideas for topics, please speak to your GP or Practice Nurse

Home Medicines Review

Another way to have your medicines reviewed is through the Home Medicines Review program. This is a service that involves your doctor referring you to a community pharmacist who will, depending on your preference, visit you in your home or arrange to meet with you at the pharmacy. The pharmacist will discuss your medicines with you and write a report for your doctor. The Home Medicines Review service is paid for by the Australian Government, so it won't cost you anything. However, you will pay for the visits to your doctor as they don't bulk-bill. This service is initiated by your doctor, and there are some eligibility criteria, so ask them for more information.

Make sure your doctor and pharmacist know which medicines you're taking by keeping your medicines list up to date. Use the NPS Medicines List to record the details of all your medicines. You can ask your pharmacist for a printed copy of the list, order one by telephoning 02 8217 8700, or download it from www.nps.org.au/medicineslist. It's also available as a free iPhone or iPad app from the Apple iTunes store.

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