Press Release
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Cygnet Health Care Doctor Issues Antidepressant Hot Weather Advice

Throughout the summer, people who take antidepressant medications may find themselves struggling to manage the heat.

Dr Somya Pandey, Specialty Doctor at Cygnet Hospital Harrow, breaks down why hot weather is a particularly difficult time for antidepressant takers and issues five top tips on staying safe this summer.

Some antidepressants can affect the body's ability to regulate temperature, making it harder for some people to respond to heat effectively.

For most people, the moment things get too warm, their hypothalamus (the body's internal thermostat) fires off signals to cool you down, triggering sweat, widening blood vessels near the skin and prompting them to reach for water. This is not always the case for antidepressant takers.

What causes the issues?

People on SSRIs – sertraline, fluoxetine, citalopram and others – are among those most affected, experiencing an increase in sweating, which accelerates fluid loss and can lead to dehydration.

Other antidepressants, like venlafaxine and duloxetine, can also cause excessive sweating. Older antidepressants, like amitriptyline and nortriptyline, tend to reduce sweating, so a person may feel fine while quietly overheating.

None of the side effects change the benefits these medications offer. It just means that summer requires a little extra attention.

Five ways to take care of yourself this summer if you're on antidepressants

1. **Drink before you feel thirsty**
   Some antidepressants may blunt the thirst response. Drink water regularly throughout the day and avoid alcohol and caffeine which compound fluid loss.
2. **Avoid the hottest hours**
   In the UK that is typically 11am to 3pm. Early morning and evening are safer for being outdoors.

3. **Know what your medication does to sweating**
   Some antidepressants increase it, others reduce it. Both are problematic in heat, just differently. If you are unsure, ask your pharmacist, GP or prescribing clinician for advice.
4. **Protect your sleep**
   Poor sleep worsens depression and anxiety. Heat disrupts sleep. A cool bedroom, fan, light bedding and windows open at night can help improve comfort and support better sleep during hot weather.
5. **Plan ahead on hot days**
   Carry water. Wear loose, light clothing. Know where your nearest cool space is, a supermarket, library, or air-conditioned room. Apply sunscreen; sunburn impairs the skin's ability to cool the body.

Signs to be aware of

If you are, or know, an antidepressant taker, here are the key things to look out for to ensure safety is the priority.

Heat exhaustion - Heavy sweating, pale or clammy skin, weak pulse, nausea, dizziness, muscle cramps or faintness mean move to a cool place immediately, rest, and sip fluids.

Heat stroke – A temperature above 40°C, hot red skin, strong rapid pulse, confusion or loss of consciousness are signs of a medical emergency. Call 999.

Serotonin syndrome - This more specific reaction can occur when serotonin activity in the nervous system becomes dangerously elevated, particularly if antidepressants are combined with certain other medications. It can look deceptively similar to heat exhaustion, which is part of what makes it dangerous. Symptoms to watch for include agitation or restlessness, muscle twitching, jerking, or rigidity, a rapid heart rate, high temperature, tremor, exaggerated reflexes - for example, a very strong knee-jerk response - and in severe cases, confusion or loss of coordination. If someone on antidepressants develops any combination of these symptoms in the heat, do not assume it is simply the weather. Call 999.

Although antidepressants, like any other medication, have side effects, they are effective, often life-changing medications. The most important thing is, do not stop or change your medication without speaking to your doctor first.

If you are struggling in the heat and you are on antidepressants, speak to your GP, pharmacist, or mental health team. For emergencies, call 999.