



## Tips for People Who Take Medication:

### COPING WITH HOT WEATHER

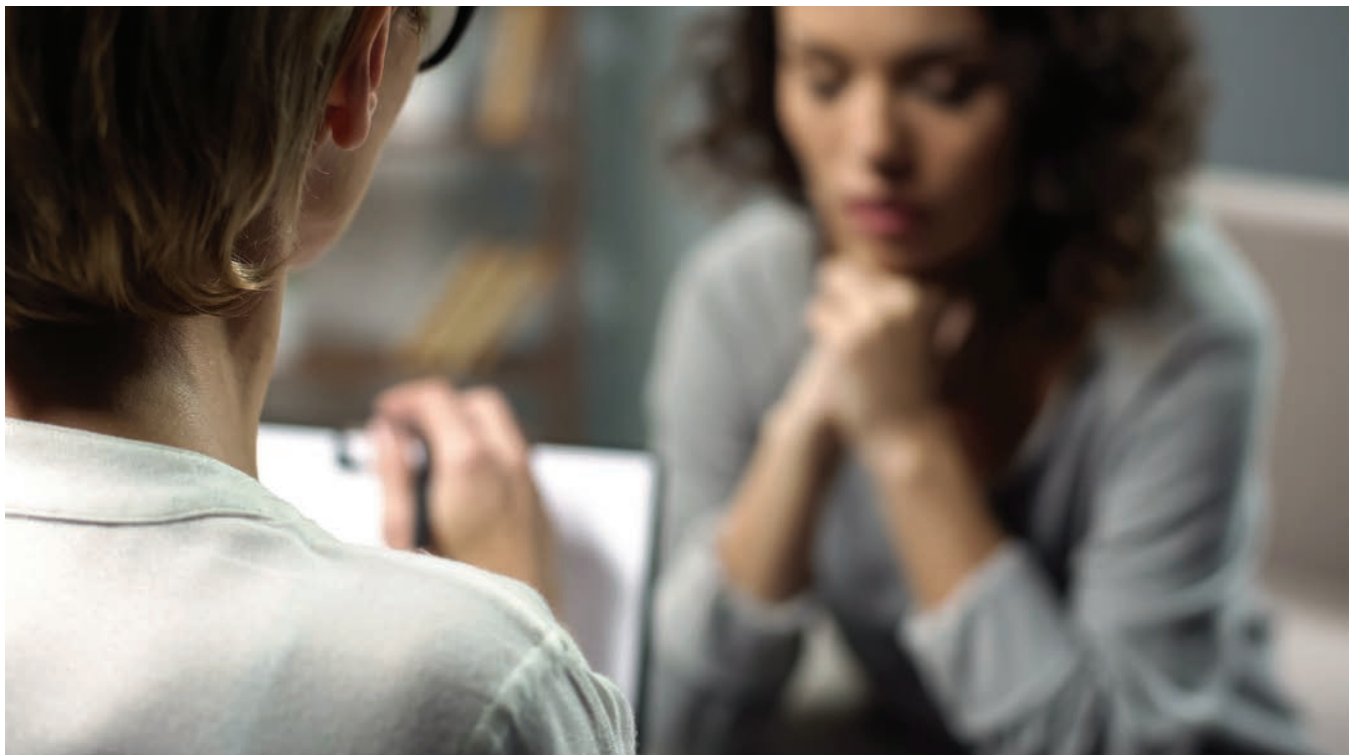
This tip sheet explores what climate change is and how it might affect you while taking certain medications (including mental health or psychotropic medications). It also identifies signs that you may be more at risk during hot weather, as well as steps you and your community can take to prevent negative consequences. The tip sheet offers ways to cope and increase resilience, along with resources for more information and support.

### Climate Change and Mental Health

Climate change is a significant change in the Earth's climate for a long period of time.

The impacts of climate change, such as hotter weather, may have negative effects on physical and mental health. If you are taking certain medications, including medications people take as part of managing mental health issues and conditions (psychotropic medications), you are also more at risk than people not taking these medications.

People living with mental illness are also more likely to live in poverty or to have co-occurring substance use disorders, which can make it harder to cope or adapt to changes. Those with severe mental illness are more likely to use services, infrastructure, and medication supply chains that are often disrupted after disasters related to climate change.



Some communities and populations are more vulnerable:

- Communities of color
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- People and households with incomes below the federal poverty level
- Children
- American Indians and Alaska Natives
- Older adults
- Women
- People experiencing homelessness
- Migrants and refugees
- People with functional and access needs
- Individuals with mental health diagnoses (e.g., those taking psychotropic medications)
- Outdoor workers



## Medications, Heat, and Heat-related Distress

People taking certain psychotropic medications may experience more side effects than usual when temperatures increase. Psychotropic medications are drugs that affect how the brain works and cause changes in mood, awareness, thoughts, feelings, or behavior. These medications are used in mental health therapy and treatment and are taken by

both children and adults. Types of psychotropic medications include antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, stimulants, antipsychotics, and mood stabilizers.

Some psychotropic medications can interfere with a person's ability to regulate heat and their awareness that their body temperature is rising, which is associated with injury and death. Following are signs and symptoms of heat-related distress to watch for, in yourself and loved ones who take psychotropic medication:

- High body temperature (103°F or higher)
- Hot, red, dry, or damp skin
- Heavy sweating
- Cold, pale, clammy skin
- Painful, red, or warm skin due to sunburn
- Skin with blisters as a result of sunburn
- Fast, strong, or weak pulse
- Headache
- Red clusters of small, pimple-like blisters on skin
- Tiredness or weakness
- Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Muscle cramps, pain, or spasms
- Confusion
- Losing consciousness/fainting (passing out)

Speak to your doctor about your medications to learn if you are at a higher risk for heat-related distress. Seek medical help right away (call 911) if you are throwing up, your symptoms are worsening, or if your symptoms last longer than 1 hour. Move to a cooler place, lower your body temperature with cool cloths or a cool bath, loosen your clothes, and sip water.

## Tips for Building Resilience

Resilience is the ability of a person or a community to function in the face of adversity, to survive, and, perhaps, even to thrive.

Resilient people anticipate risks, take action to reduce their vulnerability to those risks, respond effectively when negative events occur, and recover more quickly.

Because a person's ability to build resilience is shaped by community policies and decisions, it's also important to build resilient communities.

### Steps You Can Take

- **Create an emergency plan.** Knowing what to do during a medication emergency can save lives and reduce stress. It helps to create a medication emergency plan before an emergency happens and practice this plan so that it does not surprise you and your family if a medication emergency happens. Here are some steps you can take:
  - Talk to your family members about the medications you are taking and possible severe side effects you may experience.
  - Call 911 if there is an emergency.

- Teach your family and friends how to recognize signs that you are in distress from your medication and exposure to high temperatures.
- Teach your family and friends what to do to help you until emergency responders arrive.
- **Have an emergency kit.** During an emergency, you may need certain supplies. It is best to gather these before they are needed in one place so that you have enough time and presence of mind to get what you need and can easily access the supplies later. To get you started, here are some items to include:

- A first aid kit
- Water
- Spare clothes
- A blanket
- Medications—if you can, keep refills in your emergency kit, and write down the medications you take and the dosages
- Emergency contact numbers (911, your prescribing provider, local emergency room)

Make a checklist of everything you might need to grab quickly, and tape this to the outside of your emergency kit. Keep your emergency kit in an accessible place in your home.





- **Know your medical needs.** Be aware of your unique health history, what medications you are taking, how these medications may affect you (including side effects), and what support you might need during a medical emergency. You can find this information by:



- Talking with your doctor or other healthcare professional
- Being familiar with the medications you take
- Learning about possible medication side effects
- Understanding what might happen during a medical emergency and what steps you or your loved ones should take during or after an emergency
- **Maintain and develop meaningful social connections.** Social connection is key for overall health and for healthy habits to be sustainable. The communities and social groups we belong to have an important impact on individual behavior and health.
- **Take part in practices to boost resilience.** Resilience is a person's ability to adapt to difficult and challenging experiences that are significant sources of stress. People can increase their resilience by:
  - Practicing good self-care that includes regular exercise; time set aside for meditation, relaxation, or quiet; healthy eating; and a good sleep routine
  - Participating in religious or spiritual practices and communities
- Connecting with family, friends, and your community
- **Share concerns with your community.** Sharing your concerns with your community helps to raise awareness about issues that need to be addressed. You can share your concerns by:
  - Tapping into existing networks to spread the word
  - Starting a community meeting or event
  - Reaching out to community leaders
- **Work with your community to help reduce climate impact.** Supporting your community's efforts to reduce climate impact can help make real change happen on both an individual and community level. You can work with your community by:
  - Encouraging or starting community education about climate change and what people can do to limit its impacts
  - Supporting local climate change events
  - Helping spread the word about climate change and its effect on people taking certain medications in your community

### Steps Your Community Can Take

- **Organize efforts that bring people together.** Community events can educate, inform, and build connections between individuals within a community.
- **Start a community resilience project.** Communities and the challenges they face are increasingly complex. Climate change can bring disaster-related risks, such as unusual medication side effects in response to high temperatures, to greater numbers of people. Community resilience focuses on the health and well-being of communities to reduce the negative impacts of climate change on people who use medications.
- **Hold community education events.** The better educated a community is, the better equipped it is to tackle new problems and the healthier its members are.

- **Encourage inclusivity.** Encouraging a culture of diversity can lead to community benefits from varied experiences and perspectives on how to approach community challenges and succeed in overcoming them. It can also help ensure that potentially vulnerable populations are included in community planning, decision-making, and other processes.

## What You Can Do

Climate change can be unpredictable, and for some people it is deeply distressing. It may be helpful to focus on what you and your friends and family can do to prepare and be ready for heat and other aspects of climate change. The following suggestions may help you manage your medications during higher temperatures caused by climate change:

- If you are taking certain medications and live in an area affected by rising temperatures or heat waves, you may want to reach out to a mental health professional.
- Understand how and why climate change may affect you when using certain medications, including medications used to treat mental health conditions (psychotropic medications).



- Understand how your medications work and that increased temperatures may affect how your medication makes you feel and can cause certain side effects.
- Do not underestimate the effect of rising temperatures caused by climate change on your body while taking certain medications.
- Connect with healthcare professionals who understand your health history, the medications you are taking, and the impact climate change can have while using certain medications.

- Build personal resilience by practicing good self-care, taking part in religious or spiritual communities and practices, and maintaining meaningful connections with family and friends.
- Grow community resilience by organizing community events that educate, connect, and bring people together while encouraging inclusivity.

## Helpful Resources

### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857  
Toll-free: 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)  
TTY: 1-800-487-4889  
Email: [samhsainfo@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:samhsainfo@samhsa.hhs.gov)  
SAMHSA Store: <https://store.samhsa.gov>

### SAMHSA Disaster Technical Assistance Center

Toll-free: 1-800-308-3515  
Email: [dtac@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:dtac@samhsa.hhs.gov)  
Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac>

### SAMHSA Disaster Mobile App

Website: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/samhsa-disaster>

## Helplines

### SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline

Toll-free talk or text: 1-800-985-5990  
Español: Llama o envía un mensaje de texto 1-800-985-5990 presiona "2".  
American Sign Language (ASL): Click on the "ASL Now" button on the website or call 1-800-985-5990 from your videophone.  
Website: <https://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

### 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text: 988  
Chat: [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)  
(Español) Línea de Prevención del Suicidio y Crisis: 988  
For TTY users: Use your preferred relay service or dial 711 and then 988.  
Website: <https://988lifeline.org>  
Website (español): <https://988lifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol>

## Treatment Locator

### SAMHSA's National Helpline

Toll-free: 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357) (24/7/365 treatment referral information service in English and español)  
TTY: 1-800-487-4889  
Website: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

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Photos are for illustrative purposes only. Any person depicted in the photo is a model.



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