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.