

# Partners in Care

By Lisa M. Petsche

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## Plan Ahead to Beat the Heat

### *How to Enjoy Outdoor Events with Your Relative*

The long, warm days of summer bring many opportunities for being outside, not only on your balcony or porch or in the yard, but also at organized events. The latter may include outdoor weddings, family reunions and other types of celebrations, as well as sporting events, concerts and festivals held in various types of public venues.

As enjoyable as these may be, it's important to exercise caution and plan ahead, because summer sun, heat and smog can be harmful to older adults, especially those whose health is already fragile. As a caregiver, you must therefore be extra vigilant as temperatures soar.

The following tips will help you protect your relative's health and maximize their comfort during outdoor events.

### Before You Go

- Call ahead to find out if the venue has shaded areas. Also inquire if any buildings on the premises are air conditioned and accessible. (While you're at it, ask about handicapped parking spaces, paved walkways and accessible washroom facilities.)
- If your relative has trouble walking long distances, check if the venue has wheelchairs available. If not, rent a folding wheelchair.
- If you'll be traveling out of town, have your car - including the air conditioning - checked and serviced before departure.
- For events that span a day or more, such as outdoor festivals: Plan to attend in the morning, before the heat reaches its peak, or in the evening when things are cooling down.
- Set realistic expectations about time frames, since the heat can sap energy. It may not be feasible to attend an entire event. For example, you may decide to attend only the ceremony or reception part of a relative's wedding, rather than both.
- Clothing should be lightweight and loose-fitting to allow air to circulate and perspiration to evaporate. Stick to natural fibers like cotton, or microfiber materials with an open weave. Shoes should be sturdy and comfortable, with good treads. Don't forget a cardigan in case of a sudden weather change, cool evening or chilly indoor environment (if you'll be in an air conditioned setting at some point).



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## What to Bring

- A wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and a large umbrella.
- A cooler containing beverages. Water is best, but if your relative isn't a water drinker, try vegetable juice or diluted fruit juice.
- A battery-operated personal fan and spare batteries.
- Sufficient prescription and over-the-counter medications to cover the time you plan to be away.
- Sunscreen, insect repellent and antihistamine.
- Any necessary medical equipment and supplies, such as a walking aid, food supplements, incontinence pads and diabetic supplies.
- A cushion or two for comfortably positioning your relative in the car, and some music CDs for enjoyment, if you're driving a considerable distance.
- Disabled parking permit.

## While You're Out

- Try to find a parking spot in the shade, or use sun shades on your vehicle's windshield.
- If you must be outdoors in the middle of the day, get out of the sun regularly. Take shelter in the shade or an air conditioned indoor space, if available.
- Ensure your relative eats lightly to avoid taxing their digestive system. That means going easy on protein, avoiding spicy and high-fat foods, and selecting plenty of fruits and vegetables, which have a high water content.
- Don't give your relative alcohol, or limit consumption to one drink. They should also avoid caffeinated beverages, such as coffee and cola, which similarly cause dehydration.
- Before heading home, open all your vehicle's windows or doors to let heat escape before your relative gets in.

## Final Thoughts

- Don't forget to protect yourself from the adverse effects of excessive summer sun and heat, too. You are just as important as the person you care for.
- Be flexible about plans and expectations and give yourself an out. You may need to forego an event if a heat or air quality warning is issued, especially if your relative has respiratory problems.