

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Senior Care

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How Seniors Can Take Advantage of the Summer Weather

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Upstate New Yorkers have good reason to celebrate summer. After months in the cloudy cold, it feels wonderful to get outside for long stretches of time and enjoy the warm air and bright sunshine. While it's true that seniors must be careful in the season's heat and humidity, a little advance planning and attention will make it possible to experience the joys of summertime.

Getting outside has several health benefits, some of which are especially important to seniors. The sun has an important role in allowing the body to absorb vitamin D, which seniors need most as their bodies produce less of the essential vitamin than they did in earlier years. Vitamin D may protect against a host of diseases, including osteoporosis, heart disease and cancers of the breast, prostate and colon. Sunlight also has other hidden benefits—like protecting against depression and insomnia.

So what are some of the easiest and healthiest ways to take advantage of this free resource? If it's a really hot day, stay inside for the most sweltering hours (usually later in the afternoon, from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m.), and plan activities when it's comfortable. Try waking up early and taking a walk with the sunrise. Grandparents and great-grandparents can take advantage of their family's summer activities by going to kids' evening sporting events or picnics. Summer is also the perfect time to get out in the garden (or a community park or garden space) or peruse garage sales. If your elderly loved one has always been an outdoorsy type, a relaxed day of fishing or bird-watching could be an ideal activity.

An added benefit of getting outside is the exercise that usually comes with it. Time spent walking around the block or planting seeds in the dirt can help enhance active living. Recreation activities can help seniors remain mobile and social, while providing a boost in both energy levels and the immune system. Regular physical activity can help prevent obesity, Type 2 diabetes and even Alzheimer's and dementia.

Of course, simply getting outside is still a huge struggle for many seniors. It can be helpful to spend winter months doing chair exercises to build muscle and strength for summertime mobility. No senior should practice outdoor physical activity if it's warmer than 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Very hot summer days are perfect for staying inside to scrapbook, organize documents or watch old movies.

Though it certainly requires precautions like sunscreen, hats and even hand-held fans, getting seniors outside in the summer weather is vastly advantageous. Taking care of all of the planning ahead of time will ensure that outdoor activities don't feel like chores, leaving ample time for your elderly loved one to fully enjoy the warm season.

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