



## **Your Pills, the Heat and Sun of Summer**

By Lynn Harrelson, R.Ph., FASCP  
Senior Pharmacy Solutions  
Medication Therapy Management Services

[www.SeniorPharmacySolutions.com](http://www.SeniorPharmacySolutions.com)

**Everyone is eager for the warmer, sunny months of summer. We can't wait for the warmth of spring and then, in a blink, we have the hotter, sunnier summer months.**

Our bodies adjusted better to these changes when we were younger. Now we need to take extra care during the summer. Our bodies need to maintain a temperature that stays about the same so that we can function properly. Some of the pills we take may block our body's natural ability to adjust to changes in temperature and may cause skin reactions. In the summer, pills can cause overheating and sunburns.

**Our body protects us from overheating in two ways. One, by increasing blood flow to the skin. Second, by sweating.** Some pills change either of these two ways our body handles summer heat.

**Some medicines and drugs keep the body from increasing blood flow to the skin.** Mental health medications like haloperidol-Haldol®, risperidone-Risperdal® can prevent us from being aware that it is getting hotter outside; we just don't feel the heat, and we don't think that we're overheating. Other medications like stimulants and decongestants (pseudoephedrine-Pseudofed®) actually reduce blood flow to the skin. Propranolol-Inderal® and other beta blockers reduce the heart's ability to pump more blood into the skin. These pills also increase the likelihood of dizziness or lightheadedness as the body attempts to respond to heat.

**Some medicines and drugs decrease sweating.** Sweating takes the heat away from our body but medications such as tricyclic antidepressants

(including amitriptyline, nortriptyline) can stop or slow the sweating process. Other medications with this effect include cold and allergy medications (like diphenhydramine - Benadryl®, chlorpheniramine- Chlorotrimeton®), narcotics such as hydrocodone and codeine, as well as some natural products like jimson weed. Water pills like furosemide-Lasix®, HCTZ – hydrochlorothiazide as well as most alcoholic and caffeine containing beverages can decrease sweating because of the dehydration that they may cause. You also lose potassium with these pills and that can also cause more severe muscle cramps when you are dehydrated and overheat. One other side effect of dehydration is constipation, which can be worsened in the summer.

### **So what can we do to protect ourselves during the hot, summer months?**

Stay cool, stay hydrated and limit your sun exposure. If you are outside, wear clothes that wick or take the sweat or moisture and heat away from your body. Try to stay in the shade and out of direct sun. Use a hat or umbrella. Use fans – hand held and house fans help cool the air around you. Always have water handy. Use a sun block if you are anticipating being in the sun for any period of time. Take extra safety measures whenever you start taking any new medication during the summer months. You never know how the sun will cause your skin to react when you start a new medication. The most important is to know all your medications (prescription or supplements) that you use. Read the sheets that come with your medicine and ask your pharmacist what to expect.

**Be extra cautious when any new medicine is started. During the summer months, always assume that your medications may alter how you handle the heat and the sun.** Be prepared and you will prevent overheating and sunburns.

[http://www.srcareexperts.org/pdfs/agingwell/2010\\_summer.pdf](http://www.srcareexperts.org/pdfs/agingwell/2010_summer.pdf)

<http://www.srcareexperts.org>