



Department of Mental Retardation  
Office of Quality Management  
**Living WELL**

**Summer Time,  
And the Living is Easy  
.....Or Is It?**



# Living WELL

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*W*elcome to the first edition of "Living Well", a publication of the Department of Mental Retardation, Office of Quality Management. "Living Well" will be published on a quarterly basis and will feature important information for individuals and their supporters.

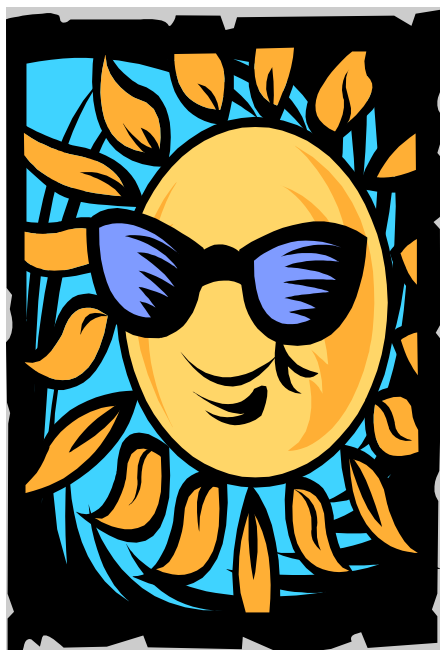
*Information will include health advisories/alerts, home, work and community safety tips, and "promising practices" in services and supports to individuals with mental retardation. "Living Well" represents one component of DMR's continuing commitment to share information which will safeguard and improve the quality of lives of individuals we support. Information and knowledge is a powerful tool. We hope that this and future editions of "Living Well" will be used effectively to enhance our service system.*

*We'd welcome your feedback and suggestions regarding content areas for future editions of the publication. Please submit your suggestions to [Sharon.Oxx@dmr.state.ma.us](mailto:Sharon.Oxx@dmr.state.ma.us). Thank you!*

Gerald J. Morrissey, Jr. Commissioner  
Department of Mental Retardation

# Living WELL

## *Dehydration*



While preventing dehydration (the lack of sufficient fluid in the body), is a year round issue for many people, it becomes even more critical in the summer as heat causes further fluid loss through sweating and evaporation. This might mean that instead of the usual 8-10 glasses of non-caffeine fluids per day that is suggested, a person may need to consume up to twice that amount in order to remain well hydrated.

**Mild signs of dehydration include:**

- Increased thirst
- Decreased amount of urine that is dark of has a strong odor
- Less frequent urination
- Lightheadedness or Dizziness
- Increased heart rate
- Headache and Sleepiness
- Dry skin or cracked lips

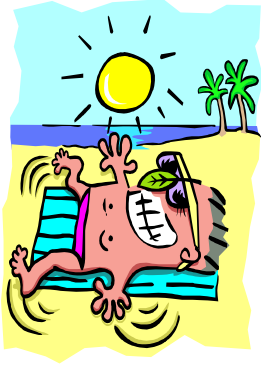
**More serious signs of dehydration include:**

- Sunken eyes
- Less elasticity to the skin
- Severe Lethargy
- Fever
- Confusion

Because many people are on certain medications requiring a stable blood level to maintain effectiveness (like seizure and psychotropic medications), even mild dehydration can cause those blood levels to rise to dangerous, even toxic levels. This can create serious health consequences for the individual. Increasing fluid intake on hot days and offering fluids frequently can help prevent such problems.

**R**emember, popsicles, watermelon, cantaloupe, fruit salads and jello all contain a lot of water. And summertime is the perfect time to indulge in such treats.

# Sun Exposure



Whenever you or the people you support are in the sun, you need to apply sunscreen. Buy a quality product rated at least SPF (Sun Protection Factor) 15 and apply it liberally to all exposed skin at least 30-60 minutes before going out into the sun and frequently thereafter especially during peak sun hours or after sweating or swimming. Not only will this help prevent sunburn but skin cancer as well.

Too much sun is also a risk factor for cataracts, so use sunglasses that block UVA and UVB ultraviolet rays. And don't forget your wide brimmed hat! **Remember, certain medications (like anticonvulsants, antipsychotics and high blood pressure medications) can cause people to burn more rapidly and more severely**

## Heat Illness

### To prevent a heat emergency:

- Avoid direct sun from late morning until 4pm
- Limit vigorous exercise or chores to early morning or late afternoon
- Dress in light colored, loose-fitting clothes
- Continually drink plenty of water or juice
- Avoid caffeine or alcohol
- Eat light meals

- **Heat Cramps** occur after vigorous activities like running or playing tennis. Their signs are painful abdominal spasms and cramps in major muscles such as the legs and abdomen. Cramps subside with rest, cooling down and plenty of water.
- **Heat Exhaustion** has many symptoms-fever, heavy sweating, fainting, rapid pulse, low blood pressure, clammy skin, ashen skin tone and nausea. Overexertion and not drinking enough water is the usual cause. To treat it, go indoors with a fan or air conditioning or to a shady spot, apply cool clothes, immediately lie down with your legs elevated, loosen tight clothes, and drink cool water or sports beverages.
- **Heat Stroke (Sunstroke)** can be life-threatening and requires immediate medical help. The symptoms include not only those associated with heat exhaustion, but also very rapid pulse and breathing, delirium, unconsciousness, and lack of perspiration to cool the body.

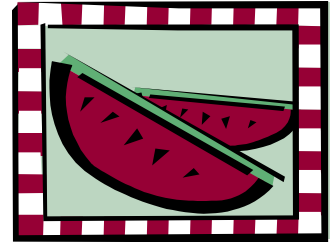
### Risk factors for heat stroke include:

- Dehydration
- Age over 65
- Obesity
- Consuming alcohol in hot weather
- Having chronic heart or lung disease
- Taking medications that interfere with the body's heat-regulating system such as antipsychotics, tranquilizers, antihistamines, and tricyclic antidepressants.

# Food Poisoning

Picnics, camping trips and cookouts are lots of fun but they can cause foodborne illnesses more easily. Here are some tips for safe food handling and preparation.

- Wash your hands. Use disposable wipes or waterless antibacterial products if soap and hot water aren't available.
- Keep meats away from other foods.
- Keep raw food away from cooked food.
- Cover your food. Insects can spread salmonella.
- Keep hot food hot and eat it immediately. Keep cold food cold and return it to the refrigerator or ice chest after serving.
- Use the two hour rule: *Discard food that has been left out longer than two hours. (One hour if temperature is above 85 degrees F)*
- Another food rule: *When in doubt, throw it out.*
- Make sure food is served on clean plates and eaten with clean utensils.
- When grilling chicken beef or pork, make sure there are no pink juices from the meat. Juices will be clear if sufficiently cooked.

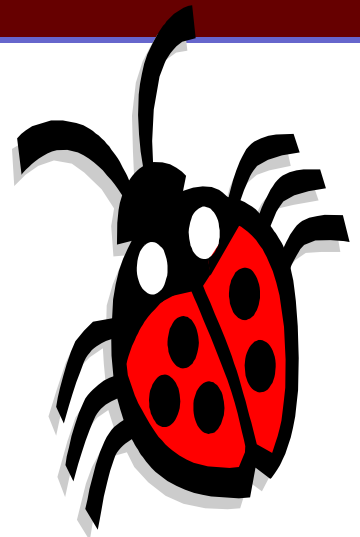


# Creepy Crawlers and Other Pests

- **Bee, wasp or hornet stings** can cause a medical emergency if one is allergic to them. You should be aware of those you are responsible for who have this problem and follow protocol if they should get stung. Most people, however, only experience a sharp pain that goes away after a few minutes. It is important to remove the stinger promptly: use a flat edge such as a credit card to scrape it from the welt, Wash the area and apply ice. Continue to monitor for signs of infection or increased inflammation.
- **Deer ticks** are tiny insects that live in low brush and can spread Lyme disease in a small percentage of the people they bite. Use bug repellent with DEET whenever out in such areas to keep these pests and others away. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, socks and a hat if you are in tick country. When you get home, carefully check yourself and the person you support for ticks. And don't panic! If a tick has attached to you or the person you care for, seek medical attention immediately. Generally, a Lyme disease carrying tick usually has to be attached for at least 24 hours to spread the disease. Ticks can be difficult to kill so it is best to flush them whenever possible.
- **Mosquitoes:** Avoid outdoor activities at dusk or dawn. That is when they are most active. Use a mosquito repellent. Most repellents are effective for many hours so there is no need to keep reapplying it. Wash it off carefully after going back inside. Wear light-colored clothing as mosquitoes are attracted to dark or bright colors.

If you would like further information on these topics or others, we suggest you visit the following website

[www.state.ma.us/dph](http://www.state.ma.us/dph)



# Water Safety

- **Assess each individual's capabilities and needs when using different water venues, such as a pool, the ocean, or boating.**
- Ensure staff are knowledgeable of people's capabilities and staff have water safety skills to support individuals while enjoying water activities.
  - Know each individual's vulnerabilities and provide ongoing supervision to ensure everyone's safety. Remember, in sight supervision must be provided at all times to fully ensure safety.
  - Before use, identify any potential hazards and unique safeguards required for the specific water environments individuals will be using.
  - Potential hazards, for example, could include finding out about surf conditions to determine whether swimming in the ocean is safe, or knowing the depth of the water or possible underwater hazards when swimming at a lake or river. Safeguards would include always using life jackets when boating.
  - Watch out for the "dangerous too's"—too tired, too cold, too far from safety, too much sun, too much strenuous activity.
  - Pay attention to the weather and stop swimming at the first indication of bad weather. Know what to do in an electrical storm.
  - For pools at individuals' homes, ensure that the pool is maintained safely and that safeguards are in place when the pool is temporarily or seasonally not in use.

**Y**our enjoying the water can be a special way to enjoy warm, summer days. With some precautions and planning as outlined here, these activities can be the basis of happy memories of a fun summer.

For more information, refer to the DMR "Safeguards for Pools" or Contact Connie Lehr at [connie.lehr@dmr.state.ma.us](mailto:connie.lehr@dmr.state.ma.us)

