

Beat the Heat with a Fan? Think Again

If you are thinking of using a portable fan to keep cool this summer you may want to think again. A fan may not be the quick, inexpensive fix it would seem to be.

When the heat index (“feels like”) temperature goes above 99° F using a fan by itself actually makes heat stress worse for your body. In very hot temperatures a fan blows very hot air over the body surface that is hotter than ideal body temperature. While a fan does evaporate sweat, the hot air blowing on the skin actually speeds up heat stress, making it even harder for the body to deal with the heat.

Portable fans do not cool the air; they just blow hot air around. Hot air blowing on you makes you even hotter. A fan should be used only in certain situations, such as exhausting hot air out of a room or drawing cooler air into a room through an open window. A fan should be used only when **significantly** cooler air from the outside can be brought into the building. A fan should not be used in homes that are already hot and are not air conditioned.

If you must stay in a hot home and are unable to go to an air conditioned place, instead of using a fan, safer ways to cool off include taking frequent cool showers and drinking cool, nonalcoholic fluids such as ice water. Fans should be used with extreme caution.

Here is a list of Do’s and Don’ts for fan use:

Do:

- Do use a portable fan in or next to an open window so heat can go outside (a box fan is best).
- Do use a portable fan to bring in **significantly** cooler air from the outside.
- Do plug your portable fan directly into a wall outlet.

Don’t:

- Don’t use a portable fan in a closed room without windows or doors open to the outside.

- Don't use a portable fan to blow extremely hot air onto yourself (feel like temperature of 99° F or above).
- Don't use a portable fan as a substitute for spending time in an air conditioned place. Spending even a few hours in an air conditioned place can be very important in avoiding heat stress and other heat related illnesses.
- If you do not have any air conditioning, try to spend at least two hours a day (between noon and 4 pm if possible) in an air conditioned place, such as a ***shopping mall or store, a movie theater, a restaurant or coffee shop, a public library, a senior center,** or the home of a friend, neighbor or family member who has air conditioning. Even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler even if you must go back into the heat. Remember, a fan alone will not prevent heat related health problems.

***Note: Due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, availability of public locations may vary.**

If you live in Union or Snyder County and you are age 60 or older and think you can't afford to run your air conditioner or if you need transportation to an air conditioned place, please contact the Union-Snyder Agency on Aging, Inc. at 570-524-2100 or 570-374-5558. If you live in another county call the area agency on aging in your county.

If at any time you are concerned that an older adult who lives in Union or Snyder County is being abused or neglected, including self-neglect, call the Union-Snyder Agency on Aging, Inc. at 570-524-2100; 570-374-5558; or 1-800-533-1050. Calls are answered 24 hours per day, seven days per week. If the older adult lives in another county call the area agency on aging for that county.

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/index.html>

<https://www.weather.gov/safety/heat>