



# Extreme heat – health advice

## Sleeping when it's hot

During very hot weather, many people have more difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep. Tossing and turning all night can affect how you feel in the morning and how well you cope with the day ahead. It is important for your health to get the sleep you need.

### Before going to bed

- Avoid excessive heat build-up during the day by reducing your activities, drinking plenty of water and staying in cool places.
- Falling and staying asleep requires the body to lower its internal temperature, so if you exercise or undertake physical activity, do this several hours before bedtime, giving your body time to cool down.
- Avoid hot, heavy or spicy food, particularly near bedtime. Also avoid coffee or other caffeinated drinks in the late afternoon or evening, as these can keep you awake.
- Have a cold shower or bath just before going to bed. This cools the body directly and can help reduce the temperature of your skin, making you feel better and helping you to get to sleep.
- To quickly cool down, wet your face and arms with a face-washer or towel, or use a water-filled spray bottle, then stand in front of a fan.
- You could also sit with your feet in a basin of cold water for 10 minutes before going to bed as heat is lost more quickly through your extremities (feet and head). Wetting your hair may also help with cooling.
- Place your wrists or inside of your arms under cold running water for about 30 seconds, as these areas are where your blood flows closest to the surface of your skin. This will help cool you down.
- Alternatively, just as you are ready to go to bed, put on wristbands soaked in cold water as this will have the same effect.

### Tips for getting a good night's sleep

- Drink plenty of water during the day to keep your body hydrated and cool while you sleep. Dehydration is a common cause of not being able to get to sleep (insomnia). Keep a glass or insulated container of cold water by your bed in case you wake up hot and uncomfortable.
- Try to maintain consistent sleep and wake times. Going to bed later because it is hot may upset your sleeping pattern, which in turn may make it harder for you to get to sleep.
- If you feel you need to have a nap, limit this to early afternoon and only for a short time.
- Using your fan or air-conditioner overnight may be worth the extra electricity cost during very hot weather. If using a reverse cycle heat pump as an air-conditioner, make sure it is set to 'cool'. It may be necessary to use a lower thermostat setting on very hot nights.



- When using a fan, have the bedroom door open to allow for airflow. Placing a tray of ice cubes in front of the fan will cool the air blown around the room.
- Flipping your pillow over to the other side can help if you wake up hot. It will be cooler than the side you have been sleeping on and will stay that way for a few minutes, allowing you to get back to sleep.
- Wear as little as possible in bed. Sleeping naked can actually make you feel even hotter as it does not allow moisture to evaporate between your body and sleeping surface. Cotton clothing is ideal. Avoid synthetic fabrics which can make you feel hotter.
- If you need to have a sheet over you, try leaving your feet out of the sheet, as body heat will escape via your feet.
- Changing your sleep position may help. You may feel cooler by lying on your back stretched out.
- Cooling your neck helps to cool the rest of your body down as well. Freeze a damp washcloth to use as a cool compress at night, and place on your neck or forehead.
- Soft ice packs are also useful. Most supermarkets sell them and they can be used to chill your neck or arms. Wrap the ice pack in a thin tea towel before using.
- Use a water spray mister on your face and body to create a fine mist. If you wake up during the night, repeating this will also help.
- Playing relaxing music while you try to get to sleep can be soothing, even on a hot night. Have the 'sleep timer' on for turning the radio off.
- If you decide to sleep outdoors because you cannot cool your house down, consider the need to protect yourself against mosquitoes and other insects. Make sure you feel safe in your surroundings, as this will also affect your sleep.
- Do not sleep in your car with the air-conditioner running when the car is not moving, as there may be a build-up of carbon dioxide which can be very dangerous.

### **Improving your sleep environment**

Having the right sleep environment when it is hot can be difficult to achieve, but a few simple changes to where you sleep and to your bed may help considerably.

- A quiet, dark and cool area to sleep will improve your sleeping pattern, so choose the coolest room in the house, which may not be your bedroom. If you live in a double-storey house, sleeping in a downstairs room is likely to be considerably cooler than upstairs. Consider moving your bedding to another room if you are able to do so.
- Replace heavy bedding with lighter items. Remove thick mattress protectors and electric blankets which retain heat and replace with a light cotton mattress protector. Change warm quilts for a lightweight, cotton-weave type blanket which allows body heat to escape. Have cool, light-coloured cotton sheets on the bed.
- If your pet sleeps with you and 'warms up' the bed, it may be time to find them a different place to sleep.

### **Preparing for future hot weather and nights**

- Keeping your home as cool as you can is important. Draw shades, curtains and blinds during the day and close windows.
- You may need to invest in block-out blinds so you don't get disturbed by the earlier summer sunrise, or by glowing street lamps or bright car lights at night.
- If you mainly use fans to keep cool, clean the blades regularly as dust builds up quickly and can affect the fan's efficiency, as well as blowing dust around the room.
- If you have an air-conditioner and it has not been very effective in previous hot weather, it may need to be checked by an electrician. Cleaning the filters may be all that is needed to make it cool more effectively.

**If you have an acute or chronic medical condition, talk to your doctor about the best ways to cool down during very hot weather. When it's hot, try to keep calm and remember, the heat will pass.**

For more information, visit [www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/peh/alerts/standing\\_health\\_alerts/extreme\\_heat](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/peh/alerts/standing_health_alerts/extreme_heat)