

Summertime and the livin' is ... well ... hot. And for people with MS, summer heat may worsen some MS symptoms.^{1A}

According to The National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS), "Many people with MS experience a temporary worsening of their symptoms when the weather is very hot or humid" This happens, according to the NMSS, because a higher body temperature "further impairs the ability of a demyelinated nerve to conduct electrical impulses." Other heat-related events also may aggravate MS symptoms, including having a fever, sunbathing, or taking a hot shower or bath.^{1A}

MS heat-related symptoms that might worsen due to heat may include blurred vision (also known as Uhthoff's sign),^{1A} increased fatigue, lack of balance, and weakness.^{2A} But the good news is that lowering body temperature may quickly reverse heat-related symptoms. In addition, heat does not contribute to further tissue or nerve damage.^{1B}

Cool tips

So how can you stay cool this summer? The NMSS offers the following suggestions:

- Turn on the air conditioning.
- Use electric fans or battery-powered small fans.
- Bathe or shower in cool water.
- Put a cool paper towel on your forehead and neck.
- Run cold water on your wrists for about 3 to 5 minutes.^{2B}

Exercising also may contribute to a rise in body temperature. To keep cool during exercise, the NMSS suggests the following:

- Avoid overheated exercise environments such as humid locker rooms and overheated pools (ideal pool temperature is 80-84 degrees).^{2C}
- Avoid outdoor activities from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when it's warm outside.
- Put cold drinks in insulated containers that you can hook on to a waist-pack, backpack, belt or shoulder strap.
- To keep your feet cool, wear lightweight shoes. Keeping your feet cool may help keep the rest of your body cool.
- Store things like "blue ice" gel packs (or other devices that can be chilled) inside your hat or vest. This may help keep your body cool for a long time.
- Wear layers of clothes so you can add or remove clothes as your body temperature changes.^{2D}
- Right before and/or after you exercise, soak in a cool tub or take a cool shower to help decrease your body temperature.
- Mist yourself with water from plastic spray bottles.^{2B}

And it's never too late to follow the advice your mother may have given you: Wear white during the summer. White or light-colored clothing reflects ultraviolet rays, making you feel cooler. And dark clothing absorbs the sun's rays, increasing your body temperature.^{3A}

For more tips on how to stay cool this summer, visit <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Sourcebook-Heat.asp> or <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Brochures-Exercise.asp>. To find your local NMSS chapter, dial 1-800-FIGHT MS.

Sources:

1. *Heat/Temperature Sensitivity*, The National Multiple Sclerosis Society, <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Sourcebook-Heat.asp>.
2. *Exercise as Part of Everyday Life* by Mary Harmon, The National Multiple Sclerosis Society, <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Brochures-Exercise.asp>.
3. *300 Tips for Making Life with Multiple Sclerosis Easier* by Shelley Peterman Schwarz.

