

FATIGUE

KEEPING COOL



Multiple Sclerosis Society
of SA & NT

Heat and Multiple Sclerosis

Many people with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) experience temporary worsening of symptoms when they have an increase in body temperature, even by as little as 0.5°C. For many individuals this can affect their experience of fatigue as demyelinated nerves are extremely sensitive to temperature changes. Heat generally causes only a temporary worsening of symptoms, with no actual tissue damage. Some people also report that a cold environment can affect their fatigue.

As fatigue is experienced differently by each person, different strategies may be successful. For this reason it is important to trial a range of strategies in order to identify those that work for you. Although use of the following strategies is unlikely to eliminate fatigue, they aim to enable you to manage the fatigue you experience more effectively.

Cooling strategies

Hot weather increases the core body temperature so cooling

strategies are necessary to keep your body at an optimum temperature. Some strategies include:

Planning your day

- Work around the heat by planning for strenuous activities when it is cooler
- Aim to leave the house in cooler parts of the day
- Rest through the heat (the hottest part of the day is commonly between 11am and 3pm)
- Listen to the weather report and plan your day/week accordingly
- Check in advance if a venue is air conditioned
- Carry a water bottle on outings
- Shop online or have groceries delivered
- Use air-conditioning in the car and home
- Keep curtains closed during the heat of the day

Eating and drinking

- Drink cool drinks as drinking lots of fluid encourages perspiration and replenishes lost body fluid
- Leave hot drinks/meals to cool

before consuming

- Suck on ice cubes
- Eat refrigerated or microwave meals in warmer weather to help keep your home cool

Cooling your body

- Wrap ice packs in a towel and hold against the body
- Use a spray bottle to lightly spray self with water
- Use a small personal fan to cool face and body
- Wear cooling products such as cooling neckties or cooling vests. Alternatively wet flannels/scarves can be worn around your neck or head.
- Use natural fibres for clothing and bedding
- Take a cool bath or swim in a pool
- Wear a wide brim hat in the sun

Exercise

- Exercise when temperature is cool or in a cool environment (i.e. air-conditioned room, or shady outside area)
- Exercise gently and when beginning to feel over heated stop and rest
- If exercising in water you may need to consider the pool temperature and the conditions of the surrounding environment. Indoor pools may have more

humid surroundings that may affect fatigue. Outdoor pools may be too cold for some individuals.

- The type of exercise you do in the water will also influence your body temperature and choice of pool. Generally, lap swimming is more vigorous than water exercise and may be best undertaken in a cooler pool.

Avoid hot baths and showers

- Adjust the temperature to luke warm/cool
- Use an exhaust fan in the bathroom
- Use a preset temperature on shower/bath taps if possible
- Avoid using bright lighting

Cooling vests

Cooling vests provide cooling for the body and have been found to reduce fatigue as well as decrease the effect of other symptoms.

Cooling vests come in a variety of forms and are supplied by a range of manufacturers. Your physiotherapist at the MS Society can assist you with further information.

Infection

The normal temperature of the human body is 37°C. During an infection you may experience increased fatigue due to a rise in body temperature caused by fever (37.5°C and above). Medical advice should be sought if you suspect an infection.

Other fatigue management strategies

Additional information sheets are available covering a range of fatigue management strategies.

These include the [Fatigue Information Sheet](#), [Fatigue Treatments – Making Informed Decisions](#), [Exercise and Diet](#), [Managing Stress](#), [Fatigue Self Assessment](#), [Planning Your Day](#) and [Managing Stress](#).

Further information

If you have any questions or require further information about fatigue and its management please contact your GP or health professional at the MS Society.

References

Anderson G, Barker S, O'Maley T, Mistry S, Richards J, Smith L, Stevens C & Ward M 'Module 4 Signs & Symptoms', Australian MS Nursing Manual.

Flensner G & Lindencrona C 2002, 'The cooling suit: case studies of its influence on fatigue among eight individuals with multiple sclerosis', Journal of Advanced Nursing, vol. 37, no. 6, pp. 541-550.

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