

Keep Your Cool!

Ideas and Resources to Beat the Heat

by Sharon Brown (Adapted from Inside MS)

This article originally appeared in the April-June 2004 issue of InsideMS. Last updated June 2008.

Most people with MS experience at least some heat sensitivity, which produces tiredness and fatigue. Fortunately, a multitude of personal cooling devices are now available. They range in type and complexity from bandanas that cool you after a quick soak in tap water to vests with freezer inserts—and even a full-size cool quilt.



A Cool Head



Bandanas, scarves, and neck wraps are on sale at a variety of sites, including www.polar-products.com,

www.bodycooler.com and www.stageoneproductions.com. A more unusual item comes from Silver Eagle Outfitters, www.silvereagleoutfitters.com a ‘Do-Rag’, which fits under a bicycle helmet. Silver Eagle has baseball-type caps that cool as well.

A Cool Hug

Vests are another staple among cooling devices. Some offer “phase change” cooling, which is simply an insert is soaked, and then refrigerated or frozen.



that

Glacier Tek, www.glaciertek.com, has vests that use cooling packs that can be replaced as they warm up by soaking the extra packs that come with the vest for 20 minutes in ice and water.

Body Cooler also offers a bra insert.



Night Cool

If you wake at night, try the Chillow, www.soothsoft.com, a water-filled pillow is designed to draw heat out of the body but not stay too cold all night. If a cooling pillow isn't enough, try the quilt from Silver Eagle Outfitters. The Cool-Quilt gets soaked in water to chill but it won't get you wet. It too is designed to draw heat out of the body while you sleep without cooling you too much, which could be dangerous.



A Working Cool and an Airy Twist

The maker of the Chillow also offers CompuSooth, a gel-filled wrist rest for use at the computer. The wrist rest molds itself around the user's wrists, cooling the body while the user is busy working.



To add an airy twist to any cooling action, try one of the Misty Mates at www.mistymate.com. These water pumps spray a mist of water that evaporates, cooling the air around you.

Cool to the Core

To get cool all the way inside you, try drinking a smoothie. For recipes that require only a blender, rather than a special machine, go to www.recipesource.com, www.allrecipes.com or www.epicurious.com. Delicious!

Here are some additional tips brought to you by *You CAN!* and Can Do MS:

Drink plenty of fluids.

- Water is the fluid of choice.
- Drinking cool water can help keep you cool.
- Avoid caffeine because it acts as a diuretic.

Try “pre-cooling” to decrease the heating effects of exercise. Pre-cooling may increase the time it takes for the core body temperature to rise.

- Get into a bathtub of cool water. The water temperature should be comfortably lukewarm to start. Continue adding cooler water over a period of 20-30 minutes.
- Submersion of the upper body in cool water will provide the optimal benefit.
- A cool bath or shower can also help reduce core body temperature following activity or exposure to a hot environment.

Exercise in a cool environment.

- If you are exercising outside, pick the cooler times of the day, usually early morning or evening.
- If you are exercising inside, using air conditioning or a fan can help maintain body temperature at an appropriate level.
- Exercising in cool water (recommended temperature 80-84 degrees) is an excellent way to combat heat during physical activity.

MS Organizations

National Multiple Sclerosis Society

Some chapters offer financial assistance for a wide range of equipment and supplies including cooling equipment and air conditioners. To find out more about this financial aid, contact your local Chapter at 800-344-4867.

Multiple Sclerosis Association of America

MSAA offers a Cooling Equipment Distribution Program providing special cooling apparel at no charge to individuals with MS. For more information and to complete an application call 800-532-7667 or visit their website at www.msassociation.org.

The Role of Cognition in Falls

The term *cognition* refers to the processes that affect our ability to think— such as attention, memory, problem-solve, etc. —and to the ways that we process our thoughts and actions—planning, organization, self-monitoring, and insight. Problems with cognition are common in MS and can increase the risk for falls.

Many people with MS at least occasionally find themselves in situations where they lose concentration and focus on a specific task or their surroundings, which increases the risk of falling. Loss of concentration can cause you to lose control of your balance and coordination, overlook hazards in your environment, and lose track of what you are doing. How often have you heard of someone tripping while trying to get the phone or losing his or her balance while quickly turning to reach for something?

Increase your Awareness

Increasing your attention to yourself— your present abilities, energy level, etc. —and your immediate environment is vital to your safety. Although you might easily become distracted and unable to sustain attention, there are many ways to increase focus and control of the situation.

- Know yourself and be aware when your attention is drifting. Internal distractions may include hunger, fatigue, and pain, as well as your emotions and thoughts.
- Be aware of distractions in your environment such as visual distractions, clutter, obstacles, heat and sunshine, cool weather, loud noises, and crowds.

Organize your Day

- Take time before your day begins to set your priorities and make a “To Do” list.
- Use different tools to help you keep your plans and thoughts organized, such as a calendar, personal organizer notebooks, or personal data accessory (PDA). Use them consistently and always keep them in the same place.

- Plan tasks around those times when you have the most energy. On days when your energy levels are low and your thinking is slow, make adjustments and focus on what **needs** to get done
- Pace yourself and allocate more time to complete projects. Take breaks or skip an activity if you need to.
- Define your tasks and consider important factors such as your energy level, supplies, clothing and footwear, and whether you will need an assistive device, water, or a snack. Thinking through an activity beforehand will prepare you to avoid any hazards that might pose a fall risk.

Example: Shopping for groceries for the week

“I need to go grocery shopping. The early morning is best for me because I have the most energy then. I will write my list of items and organize my coupons. I should think about the best way to make my way around the store. If I’m fatigued I’ll consider if I need to use the electric scooter cart that is available at the store. I will put my list in my wallet. I should wear tennis shoes since the floors can be slippery, and I will bring my sweater since it can be chilly inside. Finally I just need to bring my backpack because it helps keep my hands free while carrying the items home.”

Scan and Plan

Scan and plan is a technique that can keep you aware of yourself and your environment to identify risks and hazards and prevent a fall. Begin by taking a moment to “scan” both your environment and yourself so that you can “plan” before you act.

- **STOP**
 - Physically stop to pay attention to your environment.
 - Be cognitively aware of your energy level and emotional state (am I angry, upset, or sad?). Note whether you are multi-tasking and more easily distracted because you’re focusing on several tasks at once. Try to focus only on the task at hand so that you can scan the environment and look out for potential fall hazards.
- **SCAN**

- Listen to your body and identify any physical or emotional distractions. Scan yourself for risk factors such as loose footwear, untied laces, or clothing that might cause you to trip
- Look ahead in the environment and identify any obstacles
- **PLAN**
 - Plan your movement, considering what offers the least potential risk or fewest obstacles.
 - Learn from your mistakes. After a fall, think about what you could have done to prevent it, and what changes will stop it from happening again. Use your problem-solving skills to identify the best solutions for you.

Strategies for Managing Energy and Minimizing Fatigue

Principles of Energy Management

- **Balance activity with rest.** Schedule regular 5-10 minute rest periods when planning your day's activities. Rest *before* you become exhausted. Rest improves productivity and endurance, and leaves energy for enjoyable activities. Setting a timer as a reminder to take breaks is a useful strategy.
- **Plan ahead.** Make daily or weekly schedule of planned activities. Spread physically and cognitively demanding tasks throughout the day, at times when you have the most energy, and alternate them with less demanding tasks.
- **Learn “activity tolerance.”** *Break down an activity into a series of smaller tasks, and determine which of them can be eliminated, modified, or done by others.*
- **Pace yourself.** Spread tasks out over a period of time. Try not to schedule back-to-back meetings or appointments. Clean one room or do one load of laundry each day instead of all at once. While seems much too small of a task, it will help you retrain yourself to do things differently when you need to.
- **Set priorities.** Focus on activities that are priorities and *must* be done.
- **Practice proper body mechanics.** This can include some simple changes, such as:
 - using chairs with good back supports and maintaining good posture while sitting,
 - adjusting your work to minimize the need to bend over,
 - bending your knees and using your leg muscles when you lift, and
 - carrying several small loads instead of one large one, or using a cart.
- **Limit work that increases muscle tension.** Breathe evenly while working and don't hold your breath, and wear comfortable clothes to allow you to breathe freely and easily.
- **Prioritize your activities.** Decide what's important to you, and what could be delegated or simply not done at all. Use your energy on important tasks.

Professionals Who Can Help

- **Consult with a physical therapist** to learn energy-saving ways to improve your movement and function, with a particular emphasis on walking, balance, posture, and fatigue and pain management. Physical therapy can help you to meet the mobility and functional challenges in your family, work, and social life while accommodating the physical changes brought about by MS
- **Consult with an occupational therapist.** An OT can help focus on energy-saving ways to manage “ADLs,” the activities of daily living. When it comes to saving energy, the OT may be your best friend. If referred by your physician, an OT can:
 - Visit your home or workplace and recommend ways to do things that will conserve energy and make your life easier.
 - Suggest changes to your environment, such as reorganizing your office so the things you need most often are within easy reach, or home modifications such as grab bars to make your bathroom safer.
 - Teach techniques such as keeping a calendar or a reminder notebook to compensate for memory problems.
 - Educate you about ergonomics and the use of proper body mechanics.
 - Teach computer technology, such as using a voice-activated computer or a different kind of keyboard.
 - Educate family members about how they can help.