

**INFORMATION SHEET – NOVEMBER 2009****HEAT AND MS – SURVIVING THE SUMMER****Can Heat Make MS Worse?**

Sensitivity to heat is a recognized symptom of Multiple Sclerosis (MS). An increase in body temperature, whether by internal or external factors, can cause a block or slowing down of messages moving along a nerve. This can cause the symptoms of MS to become temporarily worse. Elevating body temperature, even by $\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}\text{C}$, is enough to have a dramatic effect.

Symptoms usually settle again when the nerve returns to its normal temperature by resting or cooling. Internal causes of increased body temperature include fever and infection, having a very hot drink and menstruation. External causes include hot weather and hot showers or baths. Heat sensitivity is also closely related to fatigue.

Here are a number of ideas you can try, to avoid increasing your body temperature:

Fluid Intake:

- Keep up liquid intake – to help the body cool.
- Carry a water bottle when on outings.
- Aim for at least an extra couple of large glasses a day. This helps restore body fluids lost by sweating and will help the fatigue that comes from heat. If you have problems with your bladder, just take sips of water at a time, say 2-3 mouthfuls. Even sucking on an ice cube can help.

Clothing:

- Wear a hat with a wide brim when out in the sun.
- Use “wet wipes” or a water atomizer on face, neck and hands.
- Carry a fan when on outings.
- Wear a wet bandana or scarf around the neck.
- Pick your clothes carefully.
- Use cotton wherever possible for trousers, skirts, shirts, blouses etc.
- T-shirts are cool, easy to put on and off if you buy a slightly bigger size, and absorb sweat; thereby keeping you cool.
- Light colours are best, they reflect the sunlight and stop you heating up.

- Wear cotton underwear, especially if you sit a lot and if possible wear knee highs rather than pantyhose.
- Men can now buy cotton socks for summer – try to avoid nylon ones.
- Choose light, open shoes or sandals.
- Wear cotton nightwear. Lots of nightgowns come in synthetics which can make you feel even hotter in bed.
- Use tinted spectacles to cut down glare and help your vision.
- Cooling Collars – many people report positively on the benefits of wearing one of these. They are available from Koolnek Products Ltd – Phone: (03) 327 9909.

Planning Your Day:

- Use the cool of the morning and the evening to do the “must do” chores of your day – meal preparation, work preparation tasks, household chores, gardening etc.
- Hang your washing out in the evening so you don’t have to go out in the hot sun of the day and bring it in at night.
- If you must iron, choose the coolest part of the day – i.e. first thing in the morning or late evening, but preferably pay a friend, neighbour or teenage child to do it for you or “swap” a task that suits you better.
- Be aware of your particular reaction to activities and heat – recording this information in a diary can help you to establish patterns and plan your daily routine to avoid overheating.
- Try a cooling shower in the mid/late afternoon with a short sit down period after. Again it works wonders.
- Cool down after exercise.

Your Environment:

- Install air-conditioning in the home and car.
- Keep your bathroom cool.
- It is possible for you to control aspects of the environment. Planning and making choices in regard to heat management will help you to stay as independent as possible and allow you to make the best use of your energy.

All information is for the reader’s interest only and does not constitute medical advice.

You may wish to contact Jessie, our Physiotherapist, on (03) 366 2857 ext. 1 who will be able to discuss other options for keeping cool over the summer months.