

HOW TO COPE WITH HOT WEATHER AND HEATWAVES

IF YOU HAVE ME/CFS



Temperature control and ME/CFS

Top tips for dealing with hot weather – day and night

Fans and air conditioners

Cooling pillows and blankets

Medications

Overheating and dehydration

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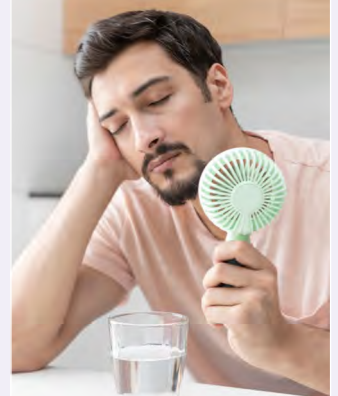


How to cope with hot weather and heatwaves if you have ME/CFS was written by **Dr Charles Shepherd**, Trustee and Hon. Medical Adviser to The ME Association.

DISCLAIMER

We recommend that the medical information in this leaflet is discussed with your doctor. It is not intended to be a substitute for personalised medical advice or treatment. You should consult your doctor whenever a new symptom arises, or an existing symptom worsens. It is important to obtain medical advice that considers other causes and possible treatments. Do not assume that new or worsened symptoms are solely because of ME/CFS or Long Covid.

July 2026



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IF YOU HAVE ME/CFS

NOTES ON TEMPERATURE CONTROL AND ME/CFS

People with ME/CFS almost always have problems with temperature control.

This is probably related to a problem with a tiny 'thermostat' gland in the brain called the hypothalamus – which plays a key role in temperature regulation and control.

In addition, the autonomic nervous system, which controls the size of tiny blood vessels in the skin, becomes more sensitive to changes in temperature.

So having ME/CFS makes people more sensitive to both hot (including things like hot baths) and cold weather.

And as we grow older, we also become more sensitive to the excessive heat.



TOP TIPS FOR DEALING WITH HOT WEATHER – DAY AND NIGHT

- Wear lightweight and loose-fitting cotton clothes and a wide-brimmed hat if you have to go outside
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated and avoid too many caffeine-containing drinks
- Eat small, regular, light meals
- Reduce activity levels and stay indoors between 10am and 6pm – unless you really need to go out
- Close the curtains and windows during the day in any room you want to stay cool, especially those that face the sun
- Use an indoor fan if it's really hot. Electric fans are a cheaper option than air conditioning and are usually relatively cheap to run.

The autonomic nervous system, which controls the size of tiny blood vessels in the skin, becomes more sensitive to changes in temperature.



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FANS AND AIR CONDITIONERS



Choose a desk fan for personal cooling, or a tower or pedestal fan if you want to cool a larger shared room

Whether you opt for a desk fan or a tower/pedestal fan, remember that a fan doesn't actually cool the air, it just moves it around. You feel cooler because the breeze helps to evaporate moisture off your skin. So don't bother leaving a fan on in a room with nobody in it, as you're just wasting energy.

When setting your fan up, try to position it at the same height or lower than you, such as on the floor or a low table, with the unit pointing up. That will blow the cooler air up, rather than pushing warmer air (which rises to the top of a room) down on to you.

Choose a desk fan for personal cooling, or a tower or pedestal fan if you want to cool a larger shared room. A portable air conditioner can cool more effectively, but it takes up much more space, costs more and can be awkward to move around, especially in smaller homes.

Portable air conditioners



Portable air conditioners are one of the most effective ways to cool a room during a heatwave because they remove heat from the air, rather than just circulating it like a fan.

These devices are another option for home cooling, particularly renters, as they don't need permanent installation. When buying, check the BTU rating suits your room size, look for features like a timer, and remember you will need to vent hot air outside.

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COOLING PILLOWS AND BLANKETS

Cooling pillows and blankets can be helpful at night.

The best cooling pillows now include features like breathable materials, moisture-wicking covers, and advanced gel layers or phase-change materials that assist in regulating temperature.

Breathable materials in pillows allow air to circulate, helping to maintain a comfortable temperature and prevent overheating during sleep. These materials wick away sweat and moisture, keeping the pillow dry and comfortable.



COLD 'HOT' WATER BOTTLE

Take a cold 'hot water bottle' to bed at night. Alternatively, cool socks in the fridge and put those on. Cooling your feet lowers the overall temperature of your skin and body.

You can also buy reusable gel cold packs that you keep in the freezer. Wrap them in a tea towel or pillowcase before applying them to your skin – it's more comfortable that way.

COLD WATER

Have a bowl of cold water and a flannel or a water spray handy to cool down with.

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MEDICATIONS

■ Be aware that some medications (e.g. antidepressants, antihistamines) can also affect temperature-control mechanisms.

There are a number of other over-the-counter and prescription-only drugs that can interfere with the body's temperature regulation control mechanisms and make people who are taking them more susceptible to hot weather

A full list of **medications** can be found here:

<https://meassociation.org.uk/ma02>

HEAT EXHAUSTION, HEATSTROKE AND DEHYDRATION

Watch out for the symptoms of heat exhaustion, heat stroke and dehydration.

Heat exhaustion:

- excessive sweating
- nausea/vomiting
- rapid weak pulse
- clammy skin
- muscle cramps in your arms, legs or stomach

Be aware that some drugs (e.g. antidepressants, antihistamines) can also affect temperature-control mechanisms.



Heat stroke:

- high temperature
- throbbing headache
- rapid strong pulse
- nausea or vomiting
- confusion and may lose consciousness

If you are concerned dial 111.

If someone has heat stroke symptoms dial 999 - as this is a medical emergency. Loosen clothes and drink water if possible.

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“Thank you for producing such a helpful magazine. The standard is consistently high and each edition is interesting and varied. I need all the help I can get and this magazine is consistently encouraging, realistic, and helpful.”



THE ME ASSOCIATION

Changing attitudes and improving lives...

■ **COMMUNITY:** We provide a safe and welcoming community for people affected by ME/CFS and Long Covid who come together and benefit from sharing their experiences. We provide membership, an essential support service, excellent website resources and we host engaging discussions on the most popular social media channels. Knowing that you are not alone can be a great comfort and we are happy to answer your questions and share helpful tips.

■ **MEMBERSHIP:** We put the interests of members at the heart of everything we do. Your subscription means that we can support more people, campaign effectively and fund medical research. Members receive the exclusive ME Essential magazine which carries the latest news, medical information, personal stories, and feature articles. **Join us today.**

■ **SUPPORT:** ME Connect is the charity's support and information service. We listen and we understand. All our staff and volunteers have knowledge and understanding of these medical conditions. We provide a personalised service and we're here when you need us most. You can contact us via our telephone support line (this is a FREEPHONE number) or by email. Please see back page for more details. You can also join ME Connected (Discord online community). To view the ME Connect telephone support line opening hours, please visit: <https://www.meassociation.org.uk/me-connect>

■ **INFORMATION:** We produce reliable and timely information written by topic experts and have the **largest range of free literature covering all aspects of life with ME/CFS and Long Covid.** We can show you how to recognise and manage symptoms, get an accurate diagnosis, a referral to specialists, and to obtain the healthcare that you deserve. We also provide an **e-newsletter** and free access on the website to **Medical Matters** and other relevant information.

■ **RESEARCH:** We fund medical research via the **Ramsay Research Fund** and are especially interested in research that can find diagnostic markers, causes, and treatments. We support the UK ME/CFS Biobank and the Manchester Brain Bank, and have invested over £2m in medical research in the last 10 years.

■ **MEDICAL EDUCATION:** We arrange training for healthcare professionals, offer a medical magazine called ME Medical, and are working with the Government, NHS, Royal Colleges of Medicine, and Local Authorities to implement the recommendations of the 2021 NICE Clinical Guideline on ME/CFS – the successful result of 14 years lobbying and hard work.



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“The MEA is doing exactly what it said it would by providing support, actively lobbying for recognition, improvements to health and social care, and funding biomedical research.”

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Email: admin@meassociation.org.uk

Registered Charity
Number 801279

THE ME ASSOCIATION

Changing attitudes and improving lives...

■ **LOBBYING:** We campaign to raise awareness and bring about positive change. We believe in collaboration and work with the NHS and social care services, the Department of Health and Social Care, the British Association of Clinicians in ME/CFS (BACME), Forward-ME, the ME Research Collaborative (MERC), DecodeME, the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on ME, Physios4ME, the Chronic Illness Inclusion project (CII), Hidden Disabilities Sunflower, and Long Covid initiatives.

■ **HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE:** The charity works with healthcare providers to successfully implement the NICE Guideline recommendations on ME/CFS and Long Covid to ensure that everyone receives the very best healthcare, wherever they live in the UK. We want well-trained healthcare professionals providing excellent services because timely intervention can lead to better health outcomes and improved quality of life.

■ **DONATIONS:** In order to help more people and invest in medical research we depend on your generosity. If you feel able to make a donation or want to raise funds in other ways, please get in touch with the fundraising team: fundraising@meassociation.org.uk or you can [make a direct donation via the website](#).

WHAT ARE ME/CFS AND LONG COVID?

We answer key questions about these medical conditions and compare similarities and differences. You'll also find the NICE Guideline reproduced in full in an [easy-to-use database](#).

MEDICAL MATTERS

Medical Matters is an easy-to-use online supplement to the more detailed literature. The same topic experts provide answers to commonly asked questions:
<https://meassociation.org.uk/medm>



NHS REFERRAL SERVICES

If you need to locate an ME/CFS specialist service or Long Covid Clinic, then we can help. We have listed all secondary care referral services in an [easy-to-use database](#).



THE ME ASSOCIATION



ME CONNECT

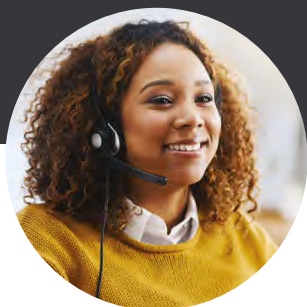
The Support and Information Service
for people affected by ME/CFS/PVFS
and Long Covid

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH:
by phone or email



Freephone
0808 801 0484

For opening hours visit:
meassociation.org.uk/mec



HERE TO LISTEN

We are here to listen,
validate and empathise
with any issues you might
be facing.



VITAL SUPPORT

We are here to help
you reach an informed
decision.



SAFE ENVIRONMENT

We provide a safe,
confidential and
understanding
environment where you
can be heard
and understood.

We're here for you!



meconnect@meassociation.org.uk

For all information relating to ME Connect visit: <https://meassociation.org.uk/mec>

meassociation.org.uk