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## How to stay cool indoors during lockdown

The UK is not exactly renowned for its blazing hot summers, so most of us welcome with open arms a rise in mercury levels. Others find warmer weather uncomfortable and, for some people, the heat can even pose a health risk.

Unlike during a typical summer, when you can spend time outside to catch some breeze and stay cool, this year will see some people still confined to their homes because of the COVID-19 pandemic and many others spending less time outside or working from home.

Air conditioning is a luxury most of us don't have, so it's important to find ways to keep yourself and your home cool – especially if you are more vulnerable to the ill-effects of the heat.

### The problem with hot weather

When a heatwave strikes, there are several things to look out for. As you get warmer, your body produces more sweat to cool you down. If you don't drink enough to replace the fluid and salts you've lost, you can soon overheat and [become dehydrated](#).

#### Dehydration and dizziness

"Hot weather makes you sweat and flush, and this can lead to dehydration and a drop in blood pressure," explains Dr Keith Hopcroft, a GP in Essex. "This in turn may cause dizziness, especially on standing, and adds to the general 'draining' effect of the heat."

This can happen to anyone, but if you have heart problems or [cardiovascular disease](#), falling [blood pressure](#) could be potentially dangerous. Overheating can also make symptoms of breathlessness worse.

## Heat exhaustion

More significantly, dizziness can be a [sign of heat exhaustion](#) – which can strike if you spend too much time in excessive heat. It's generally associated with being outdoors in very hot weather, but it can also happen if you're indoors and unable to keep cool.

Other symptoms of heat exhaustion include [headache](#), confusion, heavy sweating, [nausea](#), cramps, a fast pulse and extreme thirst. If you think someone has heat exhaustion, make sure they find somewhere cool to lie down with their feet raised, and encourage them to drink plenty of water. It will also help to apply a cold, wet flannel or cloth on their face or neck. Most people will start to feel better within an hour or so. If they don't (or if they develop any of the symptoms of heatstroke below), get medical help.

## Heatstroke

A more severe consequence of warm weather is [heatstroke](#), a medical emergency which can cause organ damage if not treated promptly. If you suspect that someone has heatstroke, call 999 or the emergency number for your country immediately. Symptoms include:

- Severe, throbbing headache.
- Feeling very sick and being sick (vomiting).
- Fast pulse (which can be weak or very strong and 'bounding' along).
- Shallow, rapid breathing.
- Very hot, flushed skin.
- Weak or cramping muscles.
- No sweating despite being very hot.
- Dizziness, feeling faint or fainting.
- Confusion and agitation.
- Seizures.
- Sometimes collapse and loss of consciousness.

## Why are some people more vulnerable?

The elderly are particularly susceptible to feeling unwell in the hot weather, especially if they are frail and live alone or in a care home. Some tend to wear layers of clothing, even in the heat, and could be less likely to keep their fluid levels up, putting them in harm's way when temperatures rise.

Conditions that usually affect older people – like [Parkinson's](#) and [Alzheimer's disease](#) – can make you even more vulnerable to the effects of a heatwave.

Certain medical conditions, too, can put you at greater risk of experiencing heat-related problems. If you have [diabetes](#), hot weather can make it harder to control blood glucose levels. And, if you're on insulin treatment, the heat will cause your body to absorb the insulin you inject more quickly, which can send your blood glucose levels spiralling downwards – known as [hypoglycaemia, or a hypo](#).

A heatwave can also spell bad news if you have [impaired kidney function](#), which affects the body's ability to filter and excrete excess fluid and waste products. As a result, many people with kidney disease have to restrict the amount they drink and can't simply reach for a nice cold drink to cool themselves down in hot weather.

## Tips for keeping cool

There are steps you can take at home to ensure you stay well. Public Health England (PHE) have released their [own guidance](#) to help you stay cool during the warm weather, including if someone in your household has COVID-19.

### Cool down

"Keep your rooms well ventilated and get your hands on as many fans as you can," Dr Hopcroft says. Using fans is most effective when the weather is under 35°C. However, if anyone in your home has COVID-19, avoid using fans, suggests PHE.

"Remember to close blinds or curtains when rooms face the sun," continues Hopcroft. Dark curtains and metallic blinds can actually make rooms hotter, but this is unavoidable in some homes. Try to open windows when their air feels cooler, for example at night.

You should also eliminate any unnecessary sources of heat such as heaters, electrical equipment which isn't being used or lights which get very warm.

### **Top up your drinks**

The most important thing is to make sure you're drinking enough. Go easy on the [alcohol](#), which can dehydrate you even more. Cold soft drinks or water are best.

It's not just what you drink that can have an effect on your fluid balance, but what you eat, too. Try to eat a [healthy diet](#) and keep an eye on your [salt](#) intake, as too much salt can make you even thirstier, raise [blood pressure](#) and lead to fluid retention.

### **Going outdoors**

Some homes may be uncomfortably hot and it may be cooler to be outside in the shade (provided that you aren't self-isolating as a result of coronavirus). If you do venture outside, wear sunscreen and avoid exposure to the sun when it's at its hottest – between 11am and 3pm. Although getting [exercise](#) is beneficial for all-round health, doing so outdoors in the heat could speed up dehydration, so take a cold drink with you.

"And if you're in an at-risk group, keep gently active indoors but don't go mad," Dr Hopcroft adds. "Overdoing your exercises or jumping up out of a chair might leave you so faint you end up in a heap on the floor."

All in all, there's no need to panic at the thought of a bout of hot weather. As Dr Hopcroft points out, "Coping with the heat just requires a dose of common sense."

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