# 7 Strategies for Coping With MS Heat Sensitivity

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## MS and Heat: How Does Heat Affect Someone With Multiple Sclerosis?

I often joke with my online MS buddies that we MSers turn into vampires when the sun comes out; crawling off for the cover of shade and spending much of the time indoors! When everyone else is getting a suntan, we're getting paler and paler and look like death by the end of the summer.

All MSers don't experience heat sensitivity or intolerance, but for those who do, summer can be a miserable time.

So, what is it? What causes it? What are the symptoms and what can we do about it?

First, let's start with the symptoms.

### MS and Heat Intolerance Symptoms

As with most things to do with MS, the symptoms of heat intolerance are different for everyone.

#### Swelling, Fatigue and Weakness

For me, my hands and feet feel the biggest impact.

When I get too hot they feel like they're swelling up from the inside out and tripping over and dropping things becomes more frequent.

It feels like I'm wearing oven gloves and heavy boots which increases the fatigue I feel. I also feel like my arms and legs are heavy and walking becomes a near impossibility.

#### Vision Problems

Another alarming symptom is vision problems. It usually happens in my left eye, and it feels like its swelling up and bulging in my head! This results in blurred vision in that eye and can have a significant impact on my life.

Luckily, apart from optic neuritis at the beginning of my MS journey, I don't suffer from vision problems, so when it happens when I get too hot it's a scary experience.

#### Difficulty With Cognitive Abilities

Overheating can also have an impact on my cognitive abilities and, again, it feels like my brain is swelling up in my head which makes thinking and concentrating more difficult. I feel my face swelling up too sometimes, making speech difficult.

All the symptoms above can have a huge impact on me at work, and because they're invisible, it's hard to make colleagues understand. People are always fiddling with the heating and air conditioning, making the office far too warm for me and I've been known to spend 15 minutes in the underground parking lot before to cool off!

**Heat May Exasberate Symptoms**

Other people that I've talked to say heat sensitivity has a considerable impact on fatigue and that their normal MS symptoms are increased by as much as four times. The effort just to exist when it's too hot is huge, and we MSers tend to want to avoid the heat at all cost!

**What Causes MS Heat Intolerance?**

According to the Everyday Health, "MS related heat intolerance occurs because the myelin protective covering around the nerves in the brain is damaged and doesn't function properly when the body is overheated."

Luckily the worsening of symptoms is temporary, and "normal" function resumes once the body has cooled down. The best way to avoid the increase in symptoms caused by heat intolerance is to avoid getting too hot in the first place so now I'll look at tips to avoid getting too hot.

**7 Ways to Cope With MS and Heat**

1. **Cold drinks and ice popsicles** – a well-timed ice popsicle has saved my life on many occasions when I've been sitting in the sun for too long, and ice cubes in drinks are essential.
2. **Spay your face with a plant mister** – Easy and refillable with cold water.
3. **Avoid hot food as this will warm you up from the inside** – For example soups, coffee, tea, and spicy foods.
4. **Cold showers** – I have my shower as cold as I can stand when it's hot outside, and this has such an impact on my ability to function and get dressed afterward.
5. **Floor fan** – this is also essential, and if it's hot it helps to drape a cold, wet cloth on it, so it blows cold air at you! I also have a fan on my desk at work which saves me.
6. **Wear natural fibers** – this has more of an impact the older I get for some reason, and I find wearing man made fibers unbearable these days. Go for cotton at all times without exception.
7. **Stay in the shade** – If your deck or patio doesn't have any shade, consider buying a patio umbrella.

**The Takeaway...**

These tips seem like common sense but can have a huge impact. The annoying thing about staying out of the sun is we're always told how important vitamin D is for MS and the best way to ingest it is to sit in the sun!

I always try to sit in the sun for half an hour, and I find it gives me a huge boost once I've cooled down again. I crawl back inside and have a cold drink or ice popsicle when I get too hot, and that helps.

Once the weather becomes cooler, my heat intolerance doesn't necessarily improve though! I live in the UK and we're obsessed with central heating, generally switching it on in October and leaving it on till May! This kind of artificial heat can feel even worse, but some MSers find sensitivity to the cold just as bad as heat intolerance.

Phew!

**Resource**

Everyday Health (Heat Intolerance and MS)