



Looking after your lungs in hot weather

Summer heatwaves and hot weather can affect anyone. But if you have a long-term lung condition like asthma, bronchiectasis or COPD, you're more at risk of the heat affecting you. And hot weather can cause your symptoms to flare up too.

This could be because you're dehydrated and too hot, making you feel worse. Or it could be because strong sunshine has caused the level of ozone in the air to rise. High levels of ozone and other air pollutants can cause breathing problems and trigger symptoms if you have a lung condition like asthma, bronchiectasis or COPD. Read more about air pollution at blf.org.uk/air-pollution. Humid, hot weather can also make your breathing problems worse.

Summer is also the time when grasses and weeds make pollen levels higher and the pollen count rises. If you live with asthma, COPD or another condition that makes your airways sensitive, this can mean you end up coughing, wheezing, and feeling short of breath.

Our top tips during a heatwave

Here's how to plan ahead to keep cool and well:

1. Check the weather, pollen and pollution forecasts

Be aware when a heatwave is forecast and how long it's likely to last. You can also check air pollution levels in your area for the next 5 days at uk-air.defra.gov.uk/forecasting and local pollen levels at metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/pollen-forecast/. Remember that high pollen and pollution levels can combine with heat to increase your chances of a flare-up of your symptoms – so have a plan ready for what to do if that happens.

2. Avoid the heat

If a heatwave is forecast, don't go outside during the hottest time of day, normally between 11 am and 3 pm. If you have to go out, plan your day around the early morning or evening when the air is cooler and the air quality better. When you're outside, walk in the shade and avoid main roads and busy streets if you can.

3. Keep out of the sun

If you do need to go out during the day, avoid being in the sun for long stretches. Wear loose, cool clothing and a hat. Wear sunglasses too – wraparound ones are a good idea. They will protect your skin from the sun and stop pollen getting in your eyes.

Certain antibiotics like doxycycline, and medications like pirfenidone, can make you more sensitive to sunlight. If you're taking one of these medications, you'll burn more quickly, so make sure you cover up and wear high factor sun cream. Always check the information leaflet that came with your medication.

4. Pack a bag of essentials

If you're going out, take a bag of essentials. Include any medication that you might need, plenty of water and a fan.

5. Exercise sensibly

Exercise brings a lot of benefits if you have a lung condition, but in hot weather take care you don't overheat. Exercise indoors in a cool, well-ventilated room or gym. Do activities like housework and gardening in the early morning or evening when it's cooler.

If you do get breathless, use your breathing control techniques to ease the symptoms. Find out more about these techniques at blf.org.uk/support-for-you/keep-active/how-will-it-affect-my-breathing.

During a very hot spell, you may want to think about reducing or avoiding strenuous activity until it's cooler.

6. Drink cold water

Have plenty of cold water and drink regularly even if you don't feel thirsty – it's important to stay hydrated.

Drinks with caffeine - such as tea, coffee or cola - and drinks high in sugar make you more dehydrated. Also avoid alcohol, which dehydrates you and makes you pee more too.

Pat's tip

"I put my water bottle in the freezer before I go out so it keeps lovely and cold."

7. Keep your house cool

Closing blinds or curtains can help to keep your house cool. If it's cooler inside your house than outside, close the windows to keep the cool air in. At night when the air outside is cooler, open your windows if it's safe to do so.

8. Take cool baths or showers

If you feel overheated, take a cool bath or shower or splash yourself with cool water.

Tip

Cool your skin with water with a cool wet sponge or flannel, or a cool water spray.

9. Use a fan

If you get out of breath, try using a handheld fan. Hold it about 6 inches away and let the cool air blow towards the centre of your face. Remember to keep your fan clean, so that you don't blow dust into your face. A floor standing fan or desktop fan can also help, and you may sleep better if you have a fan in your bedroom at night.

Handheld fans are a good tip for relieving breathlessness at any time, but especially when it's hot.

10. Eat as normal

Try to eat as normal – even if you aren't hungry. You need a normal diet to replace the salt you lose through sweating. Cold foods like salad and fruit are particularly good because they contain a lot of water.

11. Look out for yourself and others

If you know someone who lives by themselves and finds it hard to get out, check on them when it gets hot. If you live by yourself and find it hard to get out, arrange for someone to check on you.

These tips will help you cope in hot weather, but you should always be prepared for a flare-up of your symptoms. Have enough medication at home, keeping it below 25°C or in a fridge, following the storage instructions on the packaging. Make sure you have agreed a written plan with your health care professional so you know what to do if you feel unwell in any weather.

If you have more questions about dealing with hot weather, call 03000 030 55 to talk to our friendly helpline team or ask your question online at blf.org.uk/helpline.

Find out how Ian handles hot weather at blf.org.uk/your-stories/handling-hot-weather.

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: 03000 030 555

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringing our helpline never costs more than a local call and is usually free, even from a mobile.

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We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit **blf.org.uk**