

# Some ways to help stay cool during a heat emergency<sup>1</sup> (an extended power outage in hot weather)

- as much as possible, don't allow any heat into the house
  - Deciduous trees and sun screen fabric on East, West and South sides of house
  - Awnings over windows
  - Close curtains and blinds during the day
  - Close doors quickly when entering or leaving house
  - Close doors and windows when it is "actually" hotter outside (don't let a breeze fool you)
  - Insulate attic and walls
  - Calk leaks
  - Install double-glazed windows
- Install a solar voltaic system to produce at least enough electricity to run a fan, a small refrigerator, or a small evaporative cooler<sup>2</sup>
- Try to create an outlet for the hot air that rises to the top by opening up the attic or clerestory windows
- If one has operable windows one could suspend the kind of mats that one uses to line the inside of an evaporative cooler (vetiver mats are traditionally used, but pine or aspen fiber or even corrugated board should work) outside the window. Hose them down periodically to evaporatively cool your living space.
- One could also just install light cotton drapes and leave the ends in water (it should rise by capillary action)
- Maximize the use of shaded areas or create them where possible.
- wear a bathing suit (soak it in cold water and wring it out every half hour or so)
- wet yourself down with tepid water in the shower or with a hose outdoors. One source suggests that we avoid cold showers.<sup>3</sup>
- go in the pool if you have one – or the neighbor's pool
- if you have two stories stay on the lowest level of the house
- spend most of your time in the basement, if you have one
- stay out of the sun
- wet your hair; Avoid hair products, such as gel, conditioner and mousse. They coat the scalp and make the hair denser, so it attracts and traps heat. Try short hair, or wet long hair and wear it on top of your head.
- Mist skin with an ice-cold facial spray. (try putting lavender in it)
- wear a wet T-shirt

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<sup>1</sup> Some of these things need to be prepared in advance. Don't wait until the power goes out!

<sup>2</sup> Research these systems well before installation. A solar-voltaic system which is tied into the "grid" is more common and doesn't involve the expense and maintenance of batteries, but if the grid goes down, your solar-voltaic system will also shut down and will require intervention by the power company in order to get it operational during the outage.

<sup>3</sup> It may seem an obvious and inviting therapy for sticky flesh after a long 9-5, but a sudden cold shower or bath is far from ideal. "If your skin gets too cold, your body will reduce blood flow to the skin's surface and shut off sweat production in a confused attempt to conserve heat - the opposite of what you want," says Keatinge. "Far better to take a just-less-than- tepid shower that feels only slightly cooling and doesn't make you shiver - this will maintain blood flow and allow you to keep perspiring."

- don't open the refrigerator or freezer any more than absolutely necessary
- during the day stay in the cooler rooms, usually on the north side of the house
- put your mattress on the floor when you go to sleep (heat rises)
- hang wet towels or blankets in your room at night
- sleep on a damp towel / put a damp towel under your head
- if you have an abundance of ice (you may need to save it for your food), sleep with an ice pack on your feet or head if it's really hot.
- If your house is brick or block construction, wet down the outside of your house with the garden hose every hour
- don't spend more time outdoors than absolutely necessary
- use a Zeer Pot to keep food cool during drier weather<sup>4</sup>
- If one does not have a Zeer pot, a regular clay pot (the narrower the mouth the better) can be used in order to cool water.
- Consume cooling foods like lime-ade with salt, sugar and cumin powder, cucumber, watermelon etc. Stuff that is not only delicious raw, but also cooling to your system. If getting protein is a concern, wash and soak split mung beans or split garbanzo beans (called 'Chana daal' in Indian grocery stores) for about an hour...rinse and toss into a salad with grated carrots, cucumber, cilantro, shredded coconut, chopped tomatoes and dress with salt, pepper, ground cumin(optional) and lime/lemon juice...it is quite filling and tastes good. For a cooling drink - take 1/3 cup plain yogurt with 2/3 cup water in a water bottle and shake vigorously to mix. (optional flavouring : salt, sugar, your favorite syrup or fruit puree)
- Use a magazine, folded newspaper, or invest in a regular hand fan to fan yourself...it makes things quite comfortable especially if you're wearing wet clothes. If family and friends are together, each person can take turns or one could make a game out of it. Of course one could also just get a battery-operated fan.
- In a pinch, if there's no cold water, try to simulate the feeling of coolness by consuming a mint drop or a throat lozenge followed by water.

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<sup>4</sup> The **pot-in-pot refrigerator**, also known as a **Zeer** in Arabic, is a way of keeping food cool without electricity. It is constructed by placing a clay pot within a larger clay pot with wet sand in between and a wet cloth on top. As the water evaporates it cools, allowing food stored in the inner pot to be kept fresh for much longer in a hot, dry climate. It must be placed in a dry, ventilated space for the water to evaporate effectively towards the outside.