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Staying Cool in Summer

Air conditioning is expensive, but there are other ways to stay cool

Whether living in the Northern or Southern hemisphere, there will be periods when temperatures rise, sometimes to the point where it is almost unbearable. Perhaps due to global warming, most years seem to be hotter than in the past and that's down to the weather which we can do nothing about. There are, of course, devices like air conditioners that make it more comfortable; unfortunately they don't come cheap. Some types like split level are more efficient than others, but all can hike up the electricity bill. There are ways, however, to reduce ambient temperatures inside so that air-cons can be used less frequently, occasionally left switched off altogether, thus helping to keep down costs.

Whenever weather forecasts report temperatures they are always taken in the shade, and someone walking out into the sun on a 28 degree day will soon discover it to be much hotter in the open. With the sun belting down on concrete, fences, sand, sea and even grass, reflected heat still affects those sitting under a shelter or a beach umbrella. Consider this if you have small children or dogs in the car. Left in the hot sun, even if only for a few minutes while you pop into the shop, the temperature will soar way past that outside and can be fatal.

The same effect occurs inside buildings. Sun streaming through windows might brighten the place up, but it will also increase the inside temperature, often considerably. The answer here is to keep the heat from transferring to the interior as much as possible. Double glazing, it might be thought, does this pretty well. The problem with this is that the interior glass panel will eventually heat up increasing the temperature in the room beyond; and whatever the sunlight shines on will also be affected. The same principle applies to the walls of a building. Even if the construction is double brick, unless the cavity between the walls is insulated, heat will transfer to the internal walls and, believe me, that heat is a devil to get rid of. Aside from having insulating foam pumped between the walls, there is little that can be done to alleviate this unless a cool change happens along and you can open up some windows for a through breeze. It won't work, though, if the air outside is hotter than inside.

One of the best ways to keep the heat out is to shut all windows and exterior doors; then close blinds and curtains across them; especially glass doors which can let in a great deal of heat. This may make rooms a bit gloomy, but it will deflect some of the heat. Better still would be blinds or shade cloth on the outside which prevent the sun from hitting the glass in the first place. As for a cooling breeze, there is the air-con, of course, but quite often a pedestal fan or two can provide adequate comfort for a fraction of the cost; and these can be directed onto the occupants, ideal for those sitting watching TV. I wouldn't recommend it blowing over the dinner table, though; not if you're having a hot meal which will go cold very quickly. With salad it doesn't matter.

Another thought is to wear clothing suitable for the ambient temperature. Just remember to cover up if you go out in the sun. Those who have a natural tendency to overheat can stay comfortable, particularly when just sitting, by placing their feet in a bowl of cold

water; and if necessary by having the occasional cool shower. Running cold water over the wrists also helps; as does a cold wet towel or flannel on the back of the neck. Not only people suffer from the heat; pets do too, so please bear this in mind. An ice pack under their blanket at least gives them something cool to lie on; and their water needs replacing when it becomes warm.

Here in Australia we have been living with the heat for centuries, and we've learned a few things in that time. Many homes are fitted with ceiling fans, and if in the bedroom they make it more pleasant for sleeping. The alternative, of course, is a portable fan. Some people have air conditioners in nearly every room; and this can be expensive, especially when they are left on and nobody's in there. We only have the one mounted high on an end wall directing cool air not only around the main living area, but also along the hallway opposite. By opening doors to other rooms leading off this, the air in each usually cools quite quickly; and once it has reached the ideal temperature, we close the doors. This makes each room like a large cooler-pack helping to keep the rest of the house cool.

Computers and suchlike generate heat and when not in use they are best switched off. Some types of light globes are the same; so leaving them burning when no-one's in the room is rather pointless and only serves to create more heat and hikes up the electricity bill. Needless to say, cooking and baking will generate heat and it pays to consider this when planning meals; particularly trying to avoid those that require a few hours in the oven.

I mentioned before about that welcome cool change. It can be misinterpreted, though, if you stick your head out of a door and you have perspiration on your face. Even a hot breeze hitting the beads of water will have a cooling effect giving a wrong impression of the actual wind temperature.

There are probably many more ways to ensure the house stays cool on hot summer days. All it takes is a bit of extra thought and everyone will benefit.

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