

# Keeping Cool in a Heatwave



## Expect more frequent, more severe heatwaves

In 2019 Cambridge hit 38.7°C: the UK record: expect 40°C soon!  
The 2020 heatwave [probably caused](#) about 2,500 deaths in England.  
So take care, especially when air temperatures go over 30°C.

## Cool yourself

- **Spray** or sponge yourself with water- a damp towel round your neck?
- **A fan** can help you stay comfortable, especially with spray. Its electricity consumption is tiny, compared to air-con.
- Take a cool **shower**
- A **cold pack** around your neck or under your arm, in a sock if too cold  
Or put a 'hot water bottle' (not full) in the freezer & later take it to bed
- Wear **loose, thin clothing**, a wide-brimmed hat & sunglasses outside
- **Avoid going out** or exerting yourself in the heat of the day. Plan ahead with a weather forecast. Take a water bottle when you go out.
- **Don't get dehydrated**. Have cold drinks regularly.
- **Avoid heat exhaustion** [See NHS advice](#)



## Shade Your Home

### Reduce sun in your home, particularly coming in the windows

- **Internal curtains or blinds**, especially [reflective ones](#), can help reduce the effect of sun coming in a window, but not as well as **external shading** that keeps the sun right out:
- [External shutters](#) – traditional in southern Europe for a reason →  
[External \(venetian\) blinds](#) – can be electrically operated  
[Blinds inside double-glazing](#) – can also be magnetically operated
- **Awnings**, [retractable](#) or [DIY \(video\)](#), shade windows or bigger area. DIY awnings can be deployed from an upper window, but take them down if it gets too windy. Many [electric awnings](#) can automatically deploy when sunny and retract if too windy or be remote-controlled.
- **Rooflights** angled towards the sun let in a lot of heat. Most Velux roof windows can have external [anti-heat awning blinds](#) retro-fitted. Their [Internal blinds](#) can help too. Other manufacturers have theirs.
- **Trees** that shade your home really help. Deciduous trees let you benefit from winter sun too. Could you plant one for the future?
- [Solar-control film](#) on window glass reduces the sun's heat coming in, but it cuts some light too. You can fix it yourself: [See video](#)
- [Low-G glass](#): specify it for new or replacement sunny windows. It lets in much less radiant heat from the sun, with a small reduction in light transmission. Both film and low-G reduce solar gain in the winter, which could keep you warmer. Controllable external shading is better in this respect
- Not really shading, but... **white or light-coloured walls and roofs** absorb less heat from the sun. This thermal image shows a white wall's surface in a heatwave that's 7.5°C cooler than the brick wall.



# Control your home

## Ventilation:

- **On a hot day** close all doors, windows and vents that would let in air that's hotter than the air inside. This may vary with the time of day and the wind.
- **Cool off at night** to sleep better and cool down your whole home: Let hot air out by opening windows or skylights at the top of the house. An extractor fan may help shift it. Draw in cool air by opening ground-floor windows or vents where the air is cooler outside. Many windows can be part-opened in secure ways that won't let a burglar in. For example restrictors like [these](#) or [these](#) can be fitted to wooden sash windows, letting them only open a bit when you want. If your home is only on one floor, purge the hot air by opening windows or vents on opposite sides, if possible. If you only have an openable window on one side, can it be opened at the top and the bottom? If so, place a fan to draw in cool air at the bottom. Hot air will rise and be expelled through the top opening.



## Avoid unwanted heating from appliances, lighting, etc

- Choose [low-energy appliances](#) & lights: use them only as needed
- Are your [hot water pipes](#) and [tank](#) well insulated? Adding insulation will save you energy in the winter too.
- Is your fridge or freezer in a hot place? It will be inefficient and make that place even hotter. Fridges and freezers work best in cool places, although check their user-guides for operating ambient temperatures. eg: a garage may be too cold in the winter.

**Insulate** walls and roofs, especially those that get hot in the sun. Reflective, silvery insulation (eg: [multifoil](#)) is good for reducing heat radiating down from a hot roof. [Draught-proofing](#) helps keep hot air out. These measures also save on energy for winter heating.

**Thermal Mass** from brick, stone, etc stabilises indoor temperatures. External wall insulation, with the thermal mass of the walls inside is good for this. You can benefit from the thermal mass of solid floors by covering them with tiles, rather than thick carpets.



## Human choices

- If your home's too hot, is there anywhere you can go that's cooler?
- Could you sleep in a cooler room – on the north side or ground floor?
- Avoid air-conditioning, where possible – it's energy-intensive and blasts heat at your neighbours.

See this [NHS advice](#) on staying safe in hot weather. Older people and young children are most at risk.

Some people, like those in sunny, [single-aspect flats](#) have **few options to stay cool** and suffer badly in heatwaves. [It's a scandal](#) how many recent UK homes are poorly designed to prevent overheating, but the new [Building Regulation, part O](#) begins to improve this from 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

## Being Neighbourly

- Do you know people in hot homes you can invite to cool off in yours?
- Could you offer them advice or practical help, with some of the above?

Hoping that you can stay cool and enjoy the hot weather!

Tom Bragg, [Cambridge Carbon Footprint](#)

