

## TOO HOT TO SLEEP?

### HOW HUMIDITY STOPS US FROM DROPPING OFF AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT' BY CAMILLA FOSTER

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IF you have been struggling to fall asleep recently, tossing and turning in bed, you're not alone. While many of us enjoy the gorgeous sunny days, the muggy evenings are a different story... and not nearly as pleasant.

To better understand why these humid nights can severely disrupt our sleep, Dr Greg Elder, associate director of Northumbria Sleep Research at Northumbria University, sheds some light on how humidity can impact our sleep quality and patterns and how to get a better night's rest.

How does humidity impact sleep?

"Sleep and temperature regulation are very closely related – so the hotter it feels, the worse our sleep tends to be, and this is worse when we can't properly acclimatise to it. For example, when a heatwave happens," explains Dr Elder.

Does it affect our circadian rhythms?

"Yes. How much sleep we get, and the quality of it, is affected by the interaction between our sleep need and our body clock (our circadian rhythms)," says Dr Elder.

"Our body temperature has its own circadian rhythm. Normally our body begins to cool down as we head towards our bed time and this opens our 'sleep window' but hot temperatures can interfere with this.

"Hot temperatures can also directly interfere with our sleep by affecting how much slow-wave sleep we get during the night."

This is important because slowwave sleep (deep sleep) plays a key role in growth, memory and immune function, according to the Sleep Foundation.

What are the signs that humidity levels are disturbing your sleep?

"High temperatures can interfere with our brain activity during sleep, and also the way in which our brain cycles between different stages of sleep, so it is possible that high temperatures and humidity could be bad for our sleep without us realising," explains Dr Elder. "However, normally when we have a bad night of sleep, the effects will kick in when we get up the next morning. Sleep deprivation makes us feel tired and irritable, and it may be harder to concentrate and make decisions as normal."

How does high humidity contribute to issues like night sweating or restlessness during sleep?

"As the humidity increases, this makes it harder for our body to sweat normally," says Dr Elder.

"This means that during hot periods, especially when there is high humidity, our sweat can't evaporate as normal, and it is harder for the body to cool itself. This is bad for our sleep and can make us feel restless if we can't get to sleep because of that."

How to combat the humidity to achieve blissful sleep... Aim to keep your bedroom temperature near 19C

“Keep your bedroom at as close to 19C as possible,” advises Dr Elder. “Bedroom temperatures that are over 25C are bad for sleep. Electric fans can help.”

Make sure your bedroom is dark

Invest in some blackout curtains and blinds if you find that the evening light is creeping in and disturbing your ability to fall asleep.

“Keep your bedroom as cool and dark as possible and avoid sleeping anywhere else other than your bed,” recommends Dr Elder.

Get up if you can't sleep

If you're lying awake for hours, get out of bed and do something calming, like reading a book.

“Avoid staying awake in your bed if you can't sleep. Get up if you can and only go back to bed when you feel sleepy,” advises Dr Elder.

Stay hydrated

“Drink plenty of water during the day because this will help your body to keep itself cool at night,” he says.

Have a cool shower before bed

“Before going to bed, a cool or lukewarm shower, or foot bath, can be a good way to help your body to relax and tell it that it is time for sleep,” says Dr Elder.

Keep a regular sleep wake schedule “Regular sleep timing tends to be associated with better sleep quality,” advises Dr Elder.