

Is this the reason you can't fall asleep in *Summer?*

If you find it hard to drift away on summer nights, don't despair. Patsy Westcott finds some cool solutions to hot weather insomnia

We tend to spend more time outdoors and be extra active in the summer, both of which should encourage a sound night's sleep, yet for so many of us that's not the case. Why? According to experts it's all about our body's internal temperature gauge and the vital role it plays in triggering sleep, which can be sent awry by even a modest amount of sun, never mind sweltering nights if you're holidaying abroad.

Independent sleep expert, Dr Neil Stanley explains: "The underlying reason hot weather disturbs sleep is the narrower 'temperature gradient' – the difference between our body's core temperature and our surroundings.

"The temperature of our internal organs – or core body temperature – needs to fall, by around half a degree centigrade, for sleep to happen. This drop begins as we

go to sleep, reaching its lowest point in the small hours around 2-4am. It doesn't sound a very big drop, but the warmer the bedroom, the narrower the temperature gradient, and the more difficulty the body has in losing enough heat to usher in sleep."

Women aged 45+ can be particularly affected because of the dodgy internal thermostat that invariably accompanies loss of oestrogen at perimenopause and menopause. Research has also shown that irrespective of dwindling oestrogen, from around age 55, "slow wave" restorative sleep becomes harder to come by, and you have a perfect recipe for a night spent tossing and turning.

6 DREAM TICKETS

1 THINK NATURAL. Opt for light natural fabrics that "breathe", such as cotton, linen, hemp and bamboo, for nightwear and bedclothes, rather than polyester or other synthetic fabrics that can warm you up.

2 FLING OUT A FOOT. Sticking a foot or two out from under the sheet is a simple trick to help cool you down. The reason? The soles of our feet are well endowed with blood vessels,

which expand when we're hot, allowing heat to dissipate.

3 SLEEP DOWNSTAIRS. When booking that holiday apartment go for one with a downstairs bedroom. Heat rises and it could be a cooler option than one with an upstairs suite.

4 TAKE A DEEP BREATH. Correct breathing is a must for a good night's sleep, according to yoga teacher

and sleep guru Anandi. "Lengthening and deepening the breath helps calm the mind," she says. Follow the five-day plan in her book, *Breathe Better, Sleep Better* (Balbao Press).

5 INVEST IN A FAN. The benefit of cooling air current is obvious but it also creates "white noise", which has been found to help induce sleep as well as muffling other potential

sleep blockers, such as that noisy holiday bar (or your partner's snoring!).

6 EXERCISE EARLY. Brisk activity two or three hours ahead of bedtime increases production of the fight or flight hormones, adrenaline and cortisol, making it harder to drop off.

Instead, plan a walk or a workout in the morning and if it's sunny you'll ensure a dose of vitamin D, which also helps regulate the sleep-wake cycle.





Lengthening and deepening your breath helps calm the mind... a must for a good night's sleep

HEALTHY
LIFESTYLE
WEAR

...AND 6 TRAPS TO SIDESTEP

1 TAKING A COLD SHOWER. It may seem strange but a warm shower – or bath – before turning in can make it easier to get some shut-eye, says Dr Stanley. The reason? It warms the skin, allowing heat to escape, triggering that all-important core temperature drop that helps to prime our body for sleep. The best time to shower? Around an hour before hitting the sack.

2 SLEEPING NAKED. Contrary to what you may think, wearing pyjamas is better than sleeping in the buff. Why? “The fabric draws sweat away from your body, helping you to feel cooler,” says Dr Stanley.

3 A LIGHT-FILLED BEDROOM. Walk through any Mediterranean town or village in the heat of the day and the shutters are closed. With good reason. Keeping the inside of the house dark keeps out the heat and leads to a lower ambient temperature. “Ideally the bedroom should be around 16-18°C,” advises Dr Stanley. So, tempting though it is to let the sun stream in, closing curtains, blinds and/or shutters is more likely to do you a favour come bedtime.

4 EATING TOO LATE. Eating pushes up the body's core temperature as your metabolism gets to work burning calories. “Your body doesn't want to be working at night, so it's best to eat early and avoid big heavy meals,” observes Dr Stanley. Intriguingly, research has found that a carb-based, high-GI meal around four hours before turning >>