

NEWSPAPER:



DATE: August 14, 2003

HEADLINE: Why it's cool to feel the heat

BYLINE: Amanda Bradbury

Copyright 2004 Mirror Group Newspapers Ltd.

If you think the best thing you'll get from the heatwave is a tan, think again. More and better sex, and a green light to drink beer are just a few of the positive effects that the scorching temperatures are having on your body

DEBILITATING work conditions, chaotic public transport and increased smog are just a few of the negative effects of the August heatwave.

But the hot weather may actually be the best thing to happen to your body this year. M Health investigates its positive effects.

Beer's the best drink

It's better to down a pint than sip mineral water or fruit juice in hot weather, according to experts. This is because beer contains sodium, or salt, which is lost in large amounts as we sweat.

Professor David Jones, of the School Of Sport And Exercise Science at Birmingham University, says the loss can be dramatic - an average 3-4 grams a day - and potentially dangerous if you're exercising or working outside.

"You can absorb the water content in beer better and faster than pure H₂O because beer also contains carbohydrate as sugar and sodium.

"The gut enzyme which helps you absorb the water needs sodium and carbohydrates to work best.

"So the 42mg of sodium in a pint of beer helps you absorb and retain water, to be used as sweat to cool the body down."

Dietician Lyndel Costain points out that drinking more than a pint would be counter-productive.

"Alcohol suppresses the hormone that controls fluid balance, so you could end up becoming dehydrated if you rely on alcoholic drinks on a hot day. Most people do not need to top up their sodium levels unless they are sweating profusely."

You have better sex

Sunshine makes people feel like having sex more often because it boosts testosterone, which controls desire. It also increases the production of serotonin, the feel-good brain hormone.

But intense heat can double the sexy effects of normal summer sunshine. This is because temperatures higher than about 30 deg C increase the circulation of blood - and that means not only do we want more sex, we feel more responsive and may experience more

intense orgasms.

On hot days or while exercising, the body's thermostat in the brain, the hypothalamus, instructs the heart to work harder - on average around 10 per cent faster.

At the same time, the blood vessels widen to compensate for the increased blood flow and get closer to the surface of the skin.

Dr Catherine Hood, sex health researcher at Oxford University, says increased circulation should mean better orgasms.

"The effect of the blood vessels widening could mean a heightened physical response, both in terms of arousal and the intensity of the orgasm."

Your cellulite improves

The 2.5million sweat glands in the average person's skin produce around 3/4 of a litre of sweat a day - and this can increase to around half a litre an hour in temperatures of 40 deg C and high humidity.

The effect is like being in a sauna, where you sweat out the toxins which can cause cellulite.

Experts recommend copying what they do in Finland. There, it is normal to roll in the snow after emerging from your steamy pine-built hideaway. Taking a cold shower or jumping into a pool will achieve the same effect.

Candice Gardner, corporate training supervisor for the International Dermal Institute, explains: "It is the combination of vasodilation - that is increasing blood circulation in extreme heat - and vasoconstriction, meaning reducing it in the cold, which produces the best detoxifying effect."

This is because toxins cleared through the lymphatic system are expelled faster when the body is cold and those deposited in the blood and filtered through the liver are dumped faster when it's hot.

So combining both extremes doubles the detox effect.

You lose weight without trying

For once, getting lighter does not involve exercise. Your body is already working hard to beat the heat - the heart is pumping 10 per cent faster to cool you down to your internal core temperature of 36 deg C. That means a person weighing 10 stone has to burn up to 10 kcals more than the normal 70kcals an hour - just to stay alive. That's a whopping 240 kcals a day.

It's thought that the average person can lose up to 3/4 of a kg in an hour in sweltering heat - just by walking slowly. The bad news? This is mainly water rather than fat.

"The main reason for permanent weight-loss after a heatwave is a decrease in appetite," explains physiologist Professor Bill Keatinge, at Queen Mary's School Of Medicine & Dentistry at the University Of London.

Meanwhile, Ron Maughan, emeritus professor of sports science at Loughborough University, says it's not known exactly why we don't feel as hungry when it's hot but the brain chemical serotonin plays a role.

"We know that more serotonin is produced in the brain as temperatures rise," he says. "And appetite suppressant drugs also increase serotonin."