

Do You Panic in the Sun?



I'd like to think that I am a rational person, guided by logic and good common sense, but then it gets hot outside and that goes out the window.

Like most people with MS, I am heat intolerant. Many of my symptoms get much worse in hot weather. I am pretty much constantly fatigued, with a headache. I have tremor that makes it hard to do tasks requiring precision with my fingers, such as typing a message on my phone. My feet tingle throughout the day and feel like they are on fire at night.

Despite all of these increased symptoms, I can hold things together pretty well. The big exception to this is when I am in direct, hot sun. Then I get literally frantic. I actually get scared at how quickly I lose control of all rationality in that situation.

An example of this is when I pick my girls up from school. Even the walk across the parking lot and down a short stretch of sidewalk can bring me to the edge. If one of the girls has to stop while we are in the sun to do anything - tie her shoe, save a ladybug or pick up a pencil that someone has dropped - I lose it. I'm sure I sound deranged as I scream, "You know Mommy can't be in the sun! Hurry up! This is making Mommy freak out!"

I have had similar incidents with friends who innocently choose to walk in a straight line across a sunny patch, rather than dashing from shady spot to shady spot. Even the dogs have been on the receiving end of my crazies when they pick the wrong place to stop and relieve themselves.

This is not just unattractive. It is also not fair to the people (or animals) who I am with. On top of that, it really is a scary feeling to get that out of control.

I have been trying different things to minimize my reaction to being in direct sun. Here are a couple of things that have allowed me to be calm in the sun for limited amounts of time:

Wearing a hat: It is not just the physical discomfort of being in the sun that causes me to get so frantic. The brightness of the sun also makes it seem so much more dramatic. I have found that wearing a hat (that's right, a big, floppy hat like your mom used to wear at the beach) makes me feel much more comfortable in the sun, despite the temperature.

Carrying a cold drink: I got the tip a long time ago to freeze plastic bottles filled with water or diluted juice and to carry them with me. I can drink the liquid as it melts and hold the bottle against my neck or face to cool down.

Pre-cooling: Before I go into the sun, I sometimes take a cold shower. Making myself uncomfortably chilly buys me some time in the heat.

Those are just a few of my little workarounds to tolerate short periods in the sun. Of course, I realize that all of this can be avoided by staying inside in a cool, dark house from May until September. However, like most people, I have obligations that make this impractical. Besides, it doesn't sound very fun.

I am in no way advocating that people with MS (or anyone for that matter) spend a great deal of time in direct hot sun. The days of hanging out on a towel at the beach are in the past, due to the risks of skin cancer. However, being able to get from place to place during summer months will usually require some moments in the sun. A little preparation can greatly minimize stress and make it possible to actually have a good time during the hot seasons.

Do you have any tips for surviving the sun?