

# Why Women Feel The Cold More Than Men



**It's not your imagination. Science has proven that females' bodies are more sensitive to the cold.**

Ever woken up in the morning to find your other half has thrown the blankets off, as he is too hot, while you're still swaddled in them because you are cold? Or have you gone out for a walk rugged up in a coat, while he makes do with a thin jumper? Well, you're complaining for a reason – it is scientifically proven that women suffer more in the cold than men.

## Getting Chilly With It

According to many researchers, women feel the cold more than males, but their bodies are better at conserving heat when the weather turns colder. They are able to do this by shutting off blood flow to the skin and extremities to maintain their core temperature at 37 degrees. A drop below 35 degrees can cause hypothermia. As most of our biological temperature sensors are located in the skin, we feel cold if our extremities are cold, however warm our internal organs may be.

Associate Professor Nigel Taylor, at the University of Wollongong's School of Health Sciences, is an expert on human temperature regulation and has studied the differences between men and women's reactions to the cold.

"The main difference is the way we lay down subcutaneous fat [the layer of fat below the skin]," Associate Professor Taylor says. "An average woman will have a more even distribution of fat just below the skin surface, whereas this is thinner for guys." This is partly because an average woman might have 20 to 25 per cent body fat, whereas an average guy might have about 15 per cent. When we get cold, we conserve heat by reducing the blood flow to the skin. "When a woman reduces the blood flow to the skin, the temperature of the skin drops as the blood has been moved below her layer of fat.

"A man will tend not to experience such a big change as a female, because he doesn't have the same distribution of fat. This is why skin temperature is, on average, cooler for a woman than a man."

This means women often feel cold before men do. "If we reduce the blood flow to the skin we're going to get more messages from the cold sensors in the skin that we are chilly," Associate Professor Taylor says. "So when a woman says she is cold, she really means her skin is cold."

## Cold Hands, Warm Heart

Women's hands and feet are also colder than men's when the air temperature is cold. Research published in The Lancet medical journal in 1998 reported that women's hand temperatures were, on average, 2.8 degrees lower than men's.

Associate Professor Taylor says, "The blood flow to the hands and feet changes very rapidly so that we can lose or conserve heat. The blood vessels to the hands and feet are the first to constrict when we feel cold. So a woman will constrict the blood flow to the feet and hands before a man will, and this is why she feels colder." Despite this, The Lancet study also showed that women's core body temperatures are, on average, 0.4 degrees higher than men's – meaning they literally have cold hands, but a warm heart.

Mark Newton, an environmental physiology researcher at the University of Portsmouth in the UK, says it isn't clear why women and men are different, but one possible theory as to why women have this system is that it enables them to survive freezing temperatures. As females have less muscle mass than men, they need a more efficient technique of protecting their core body temperature. A woman's core temperature

also fluctuates throughout her menstrual cycle. It goes from 36.9 degrees to a peak of 37.4 degrees, so she will feel the cold more acutely depending on which point she is at in her cycle.

In contrast, a man's core temperature remains fairly steady at about 37 degrees.

**Tips to keep warm include wearing lots of layers, heating homes and eating regular meals. And getting your partner to heat up a wheatbag for you!**

## Cold All The Time?

### **Hypothyroidism**

The thyroid produces hormones to help your body convert oxygen and calories into energy. In hypothyroidism the thyroid works too slowly.

### **Diabetes**

If your hands and feet feel numb or tingly, you could have type 2 diabetes. It develops when your body is unable to process insulin, the hormone that helps cells convert blood sugar into energy.

### **Raynaud's**

If your fingers, toes, ears or nose hurt when exposed to the cold, you may have Raynaud's. The artery wall muscles go into spasm, interrupting the blood supply to hands or feet.

### **Anaemia**

If you don't have enough haemoglobin in your red blood cells, oxygen can't be effectively carried from the lungs to the rest of the body. It is often caused by low iron.

**Reference:** *Lucy Ballinger* body+soul



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