

Electric Blanket Warnings

The cold winter nights are upon us and we need to keep warm. If you think you should unpack your electric blanket, think again.



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May disrupt sleep

Overheating your body during sleep is believed to disrupt your sleep cycle. A study was conducted at the Center for Sleep Research at the University of South Australia to examine the effect of a direct increase in body temperature during sleep. Sixteen subjects were heated with electric blankets under different conditions, such as at different times and for different lengths of time. Sleep quality was observed by researchers and was recorded by polysomnography (monitoring of relevant normal and abnormal physiological activity during sleep).

The researchers observed that an increase in body temperature was associated with a significant decrease in sleep efficiency between 3:30 am and 7:30 am. A strong trend was observed in the number of arousals (waking) during sleep associated with higher body temperatures. The researchers concluded that an increase in body temperature at night may disrupt sleep and may lead to poor daily regulation of the sleep/wake cycle.

Electric blankets and breast cancer

A study published in the American Journal of Epidemiology reported that electric blankets are associated with an increased incidence of breast cancer.

The study, conducted at the Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, involved the analysis of 304 cases of African-American women (aged 20 to 64) diagnosed with breast cancer who lived in one of three Tennessee counties. Another 305 African-American women without breast cancer were analyzed for the purpose of comparison. Information on the use of an electric blanket or heated water bed and other risk factors was collected through telephone interviews.

The researchers observed that the breast cancer risk associated with use of an electric blanket increased with the number of years of use, the number of seasons of use and the length of time of use during sleep. The researchers concluded that the use of electric blankets may increase breast cancer risk in African-American women aged 20 to 64 years.

Find other ways to stay warm

Based on the studies above, it would appear that electric blankets are not the safest option for keeping warm at night. Try a good old-fashioned duvet or a thick blanket. If your feet get cold, try wearing socks to bed.