What to expect when switching to a heat pump

A guide to how heat from a heat pump "feels" different, and why that's normal.

When you replace an oil, gas, propane, or electric resistance heating system with an electric heat pump, one of the biggest changes you may notice is **how the heat feels**. This difference can surprise homeowners at first, but it's a normal part of how heat pumps work, and often a sign that the system is operating efficiently.

If you've converted from a hot water baseboard or steam radiator distribution system for your heating, moving to a forced warm air system will feel slightly different, but there are many benefits to heating and cooling with a heat pump.

This guide explains what to expect, why the heat distribution may feel different with a heat pump, and how to get the best performance and comfort from your new system.

Note that this information applies to both partial and whole home heat pump displacement scenarios, whenever the heat pump is providing heat.

1 Heat pumps deliver steady heat, not "blast" heat

Traditional fossil-fuel systems, like oil, propane, and gas furnaces and boilers, combust fuel which burns at high temperatures and therefore can deliver **very hot air or very hot water**. When they run, furnaces often deliver air between **120–160°F**, which feels warmer than the ambient air.

Heat pumps work differently. As opposed to higher temperature and shorter blasts of heat, heat pumps produce **gentler, more consistent heat. Supply air** is typically around **85–105°F**, depending on outdoor conditions. Additionally, heat pumps are designed to operate "slow and steady", meaning the heating cycles (running times) are longer and more efficient.

What this means for you

- The air coming from your heat pump may feel **less hot to your hand**, even though it is effectively warming your home.
- Comfort comes from **maintaining a stable indoor temperature**, not from brief blasts of very hot air.
- Your heat pump operates more efficiently at a continuous, lower level, as opposed to more extreme calls for heating or cooling. Due to this, you may consider a "set it and forget it" approach to achieve a comfortable temperature efficiently.

2 Heat pumps run longer while using less energy

Because heat pumps use steady heat, they may run **for longer periods** compared to a furnace or boiler that cycles on/off. This is intentional and is often a more efficient use of your heat pump as opposed to programming large temperature swings.

Longer run time is normal and efficient

In fact, continuous operation:

- Reduces temperature swings
- Maintains comfort more evenly
- Uses less energy than short, high-intensity furnace cycles

If your heat pump seems to "always be on" that is often a sign it is working correctly.

3 Heat pumps excel at maintaining temperature, not catching up quickly

Fossil-fuel systems can raise room temperatures quickly because of their high heat output. Heat pumps increase temperatures more gradually.

What this means:

- Big thermostat setbacks (like lowering the heat 6–10 degrees at night) can make it hard for the system to catch up in the morning.
- Best practice: **Keep your thermostat at a steady setting**, or use smaller setbacks (2–3 degrees max).

4 Airflow may be more noticeable from ductless units

If you install ductless mini-split indoor units:

- You may feel a **steady, gentle airflow**, even when the system is maintaining temperature.
- This is normal since the system modulates, instead of turning on/off.

If you install a ducted heat pump:

- Air may blow at a lower temperature but higher volume to move heat efficiently.
- Vents may feel "cooler" to the touch but still be warming the space.

5 During very cold weather, the system may feel different

Modern cold-climate heat pumps are designed to deliver heating even at temperatures well below freezing, but you may notice:

- Air temperature from the indoor unit may drop as the outdoor temperature drops.
- The system may run almost continuously to maintain set temperatures.
- You may hear the outdoor unit go into **defrost mode**, which is temporary but necessary to maintain efficient operation.

6 Comfort is often improved overall

Many homeowners report that after adjusting their expectations, they appreciate the **more even and stable heating** heat pumps provide.

Benefits include:

- No more overheating or hot/cold swings
- Quieter operation in some scenarios
- Improved humidity control
- Cooling in summer from the same system

7 How to get the best comfort from your new heat pump

Here are simple tips to ensure a smooth transition:

Do

- ✔ Set it and forget it, use steady thermostat settings
- ✔ Keep filters clean and vents/indoor units unobstructed
- ✔ Use “Cool” or “Heat” mode
- ✔ Ask your contractor about optimal fan settings for your home

Don’t

- ✘ Expect high-temperature blasts of heat
- ✘ Use large nighttime temperature setbacks
- ✘ Close doors or block airflow to rooms served by the same head/unit
- ✘ Rely on space heaters unless absolutely necessary, as they can increase costs

8 When to reach out for help

You should contact your installer if:

- Your heat pump cannot maintain a reasonable indoor temperature
- You hear unusual noises or see repeated error codes
- Your energy bills are unexpectedly high when not experiencing extreme temperatures

These may indicate a setup, sizing, or installation issue.

Different means efficient

Heat pumps heat your home **a different way**, but once you get used to the steadier, more consistent warmth, many customers find the comfort **better** than their previous system. Your heat pump, especially combined with improved insulation levels, is capable of providing improved comfort from season to season.

Learn more at **MassSave.com/HeatPump**.