



## **Education**

### **Hot Flashes**

#### **What are hot flashes?**

Hot flashes are sudden sensations of flushing and heat that some women feel when they are going through menopause. They are one of the most common and earliest signs of menopause.

#### **How do they occur?**

Hot flashes result from a decrease in the female hormone estrogen. Their exact cause is not completely understood, but it is believed that estrogen production affects the part of the brain that controls the body's temperature. Blood vessels in the face, chest, and body widen and make you feel warmer.

Hot flashes usually appear suddenly and without any warning, but they may be triggered by emotional stress, excitement, anxiety, alcohol, or some foods.

#### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms of a hot flash include:

- redness and warmth on the skin of your face, neck, shoulders, or upper chest
- pounding heartbeat
- sweating followed by a slight chill.

Hot flashes may last a few seconds or as long as 30 minutes. Most last no longer than 2 or 3 minutes. Hot flashes are most troublesome when they occur at night and interrupt your sleep.

#### **How are they diagnosed?**

Your health care provider will examine you and ask about your symptoms.

#### **What is the treatment?**

If your hot flashes are mild and infrequent, use a fan or sip a glass of cool water or juice when a hot flash begins.

Some natural remedies may help give some relief of hot flashes. For example, soybeans contain isoflavones, which are similar to the hormone estrogen.

If your hot flashes are frequent and severe, and if you have night sweats severe enough to keep you from sleeping, your health care provider may suggest hormone therapy. This treatment involves taking the 2 hormones estrogen and progesterone if you still have your uterus. You may take estrogen without progesterone if you no longer have your uterus. The hormones can be prescribed as pills that you swallow, skin patches, creams, vaginal suppositories, vaginal rings, shots, or pellets placed under the skin. You and your health care provider should discuss the risks and benefits of estrogen hormone therapy. The hormones may increase your risk of heart attacks, strokes, blood clots, or breast cancer.

Other medicines your provider may prescribe are Catapres (clonidine) or Bellergal, a medicine that contains phenobarbital.

Talk to your provider about what might be the best treatment for you.

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### **How long will the hot flashes last?**

Hot flashes may begin before you have stopped having your menstrual periods. They may stop after a few months, or they may continue for as long as 5 years or more.

### **How can I take care of myself?**

Try to keep cool, both physically and emotionally.

- Avoid hot, spicy foods.
- Keep as cool as you can in hot weather or in warm rooms. Wear light, cotton clothing and dress in loose layers. Keep your house cool and use lightweight blankets at night.
- Don't drink or eat a lot of red wine, chocolate, or aged cheeses. These foods contain a chemical that can affect your body's thermostat and trigger a hot flash.
- Avoid smoking, alcohol, and caffeine.
- Exercise regularly, according to your health care provider's recommendation.
- Use relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises, to help relieve stress.

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