



Hot Flashes

What are hot flashes?

Hot flashes are sudden feelings of warmth. They usually begin on the face and chest and then spread through the body. Often lasting a few minutes, hot flashes can be accompanied by sweats, chills and anxiety. They can occur many times a day, including during sleep, and can have a real impact on quality of life. Though most common in women, some men can experience hot flashes as well.

Hot flashes are an overreaction of the body to small increases in its temperature. The body works to cool itself by first rushing blood to the skin, which causes feelings of warmth. This then leads to heat-loss through sweating, sometimes with chills. Hot flashes combined with sweats that happen while sleeping are often called night sweats.

In women, hot flashes can be caused by low levels of the hormone estrogen. This can be due to natural menopause or early menopause brought on by certain cancer treatments, such as radiation therapy to the pelvis, removal of the ovaries, and certain chemotherapies and hormone therapies. In men, hot flashes can be caused by low levels of the hormone testosterone, most often due to prostate cancer treatment, such as surgery to remove one or both testicles, or hormone therapy.

Hot flashes can range from mild to severe and can happen rarely or many times a day.

Signs and symptoms of hot flashes

Signs and symptoms of hot flashes include a sudden warm feeling over your face, neck and chest that may move across your body, causing you to sweat and your face to turn red. You may also experience a heartbeat that is faster than normal. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and happen many times a day or more rarely.

How do you diagnose hot flashes?

Your health care provider can usually diagnose hot flashes based on a description of your symptoms. Some women may require a blood test to determine if the cause is menopause.

Try to avoid triggers

Triggers are actions that may cause hot flashes. While you won't be able to stop hot flashes completely, you should try to avoid things that may start them. The following list includes examples of possible triggers.

Food & drink triggers:

- caffeine
- diet pills
- alcohol
- spicy food
- foods with nitrates
- hot beverages

Lifestyle triggers:

- stress
- smoking
- inactivity
- hot tub
- hot environment
- obesity

Do you have triggers? If so, what are they and how do you manage them?



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How do you manage hot flashes?

There are many simple changes that may help manage your hot flashes, including:

- Dress in layers so you can peel one off when you get warmer.
- Take a cool shower before bed.
- When possible, lower the thermostat, use air conditioning, ceiling fans or handheld fans.
- Use an ice pack or frozen water bottle on the back of your neck.

There are many simple lifestyle changes that have proven effective to treat hot flashes, including:

- Exercise
- Relaxation and stress reduction – such as meditation, breathing and visual exercises, massage and yoga
- Acupuncture
- Changing diet – for some, having a low fat diet is helpful in managing hot flashes. Ask your health care provider for a referral to a dietitian.

Prescription Medications

Prescription medication may be an option for moderate to severe hot flashes that aren't managed with lifestyle changes. Short-term menopausal hormone therapy is the most common choice but isn't right for some women, such as those with a history of breast cancer or other issues. Discuss your options, and their risks and benefits, with a health care provider.

Additional Resources

- National Institutes of Health – Menopausal Hormone Therapy Information: nih.gov
- National Institute on Aging: nia.nih.gov

This handout is for informational purposes only. It should not be used in place of advice or instructions given by your doctor. Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have questions about your care.

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