

Title: Hot Flashes Driving You Crazy?

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Abstract: Hot flashes are a common perimenopausal symptom, and are frequently mentioned during office visits with women going through menopause. This document presents a general overview of hot flashes, as well as some options for treatment. The brochure begins with an explanation of what hot flashes are, and then goes into treatment options grouped by severity of symptoms. For mild hot flashes, diet and lifestyle changes are recommended. For moderate to severe hot flashes, women can try herbal remedies (though scientific evidence proving efficacy is lacking), or may talk to their doctor about prescription treatment options.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Primary Care Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

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## *Prescription Options*

If natural remedies and dietary supplements are not working, and you're still having moderate to severe symptoms, your doctor may prescribe hormone therapy or other prescription options.

- Estrogen – the “gold standard” for menopause treatment, needs to be used with progesterone in women who have not had a hysterectomy
- Antidepressants – in low doses may reduce hot flashes, ask your doctor about possible side-effects.
- Gabapentin – used to treat pain associated with shingles, may also reduce hot flashes.
- Clonidine – a pill or patch usually used for blood pressure control, may also reduce hot flashes.

Be sure to talk with your doctor about possible side-effects.

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## Hot Flashes Driving You Crazy?



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Options for minimizing  
discomfort during  
menopause...

## What are hot flashes?



- A feeling of warmth or intense heat spreading through your body
- A flushed appearance with red blotchy skin
- Perspiration (usually upper body)

Hot flashes are common during “perimenopause” – the period of time leading up to menopause, and tend to peak during the first couple of years of true “menopause”, the period of time when regular menstrual cycles have stopped.

Although they can last up to 30 minutes, most hot flashes subside within a couple of minutes.

## For Milder Hot Flashes...

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If you are having just a few hot flashes per day, and they don't interfere with your normal activities, you may be able to manage them with simply diet and lifestyle changes.

### Stay Cool...

Hot flashes may be triggered by slight changes in body temperature. Dress in layers that can be easily removed if you begin to feel warm. Have a fan available if you don't have air conditioning. If you feel a hot flash coming on, sip a cold drink.

### Get Moving!

Menopause is a crucial time to be getting regular exercise. Aerobic activity such as brisk walking, 30 minutes or more, on most days of the week is ideal.

### You Are What You Eat...

Avoid hot and spicy foods if you feel a hot flash coming on. Caffeine and alcohol also tend to bring on hot flashes. Learn what your trigger foods are and try to avoid these as much as possible.

### Don't Smoke!

Smoking has been linked to increased hot flashes, not to mention other serious health conditions, such as heart disease, cancer and stroke!

### Kick Back...

Decreased stress has been linked to fewer hot flashes. Ways to deal with stress include meditation, yoga, and relaxation. These methods also tend to improve sleep disturbances that tend to occur with menopause.

## Natural Remedies

Some of the more common natural remedies that women use to curb hot flashes include:

- Black cohosh – although studies have shown that this root extract is safe to use, studies are inconsistent in terms of effectiveness.
- Soy – again, studies have generally shown no benefit of soy for relief of hot flashes. Soy and red clover contain “isoflavones” – estrogen-like compounds. If you have had breast cancer, be sure to talk to your doctor before using these remedies!
- Vitamin E – studies have shown no benefit, therefore this is no longer recommended in the U.S. for relief of hot flashes.

Just because remedies are natural doesn't mean they're safe! Always discuss what you are taking with your doctor!

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