A portrait of a Black woman with voluminous, curly black hair and black-rimmed glasses. She is wearing a purple V-neck sweater and looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a light, neutral color. The image is partially overlaid by a large orange triangle in the top right and a teal triangle in the bottom right.

THE HOT FLASH HANDBOOK

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03 What Is A Hot Flash?



A hot flash (also known as a hot flush) is a sudden feeling of heat, usually on your face, neck, shoulders, and chest. You may begin sweating profusely, and your heart might start pounding. When onlookers see you, they may perceive you as becoming suddenly irritable, increasingly impatient and looking for quick relief.

These symptoms can last for only a few seconds or minutes, or they can go on for as long as half an hour. The overheated sensation is sometimes followed by a slight chill, and hot flashes that occur during the night are called night sweats.

LET YOUR FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES KNOW THAT'S GOING ON. IT IS A NATURAL PART OF LIFE.

For some women, hot flashes are little more than a nuisance, an occasional passing sensation of warmth. Others experience intense waves of heat that come on out of the blue, leaving them drenched in sweat several times a day and disturbing their sleep at night.



Support A Loved One 04

SUPPORT A FRIEND OR LOVED ONE BY...

- OFFERING SOMETHING COOL TO DRINK
- CIRCULATING VENTILATION (turning on A/C, opening doors, windows, etc.)
- FANNING
- PROVIDING SHADE IF IN SUN
- COOKING WITHOUT SPICES
- GIVING YOU SPACE

All of these are helpful actions to take into consideration when a friend or loved one is experiencing a hot flash.

05 Causes

Researchers don't know exactly what causes hot flashes, but they're thought to be linked to a decrease in the body's production of estrogen. This is something that usually happens as you approach menopause. In fact, hot flashes are the most common sign that menopause is on the way.

ABOUT 75% OF WOMEN HAVE HOT FLASHES, OFTEN BEGINNING 2 OR 3 YEARS BEFORE THEY STOP MENSTRUATING AND, IN SOME CASES, EVEN EARLIER. SOME WOMEN ARE BOTHERED FOR ONLY A FEW MONTHS, BUT MORE COMMONLY, HOT FLASHES CONTINUE FOR 3 TO 5 YEARS.

You can also get hot flashes after giving birth (when your estrogen levels fall back to normal), after having your ovaries removed (since that's where your estrogen comes from), or during a time when you're on medications such as GnRH inhibitors or tamoxifen (because they're designed to reduce your estrogen levels). Finally, you may experience similar symptoms if your levels of thyroid hormone are out of whack.



According to the U.S. National Institute on Aging, the earlier in life hot flashes begin, the longer they may last. However, there are ways to manage hot flashes and get relief during outbreaks:

1 Keep Cool

Slight increases in your body's core temperature can trigger hot flashes. Dress in layers so that you can remove clothing when you feel warm. Open windows or use a fan or air conditioner. Lower the room temperature, if you can. If you feel a hot flash coming on, sip a cold drink.

2 Watch Your Diet

Hot and spicy foods, caffeinated beverages, and alcohol can trigger hot flashes. Learn to recognize your triggers and avoid them.

07 Lifestyle Remedies... cont.

3 Relax

Some women find relief from mild hot flashes through meditation; slow, deep breathing; or other stress-reducing techniques. Even if these approaches don't quell your hot flashes, they might provide other benefits, such as easing sleep disturbances that tend to occur with menopause.

5 Lose Weight

If you're overweight or obese, losing weight might help ease your hot flashes.

4 Don't Smoke

Smoking is linked to increased hot flashes. By not smoking, you might reduce hot flashes, as well as your risk of many serious health conditions, such as heart disease, stroke and cancer.



Many women have turned to alternative medicine, including mind and body techniques and dietary supplements to help curb hot flashes. There is a shortage of well-designed studies on complementary health practices for hot flashes, but research is progressing.

MIND AND BODY APPROACHES

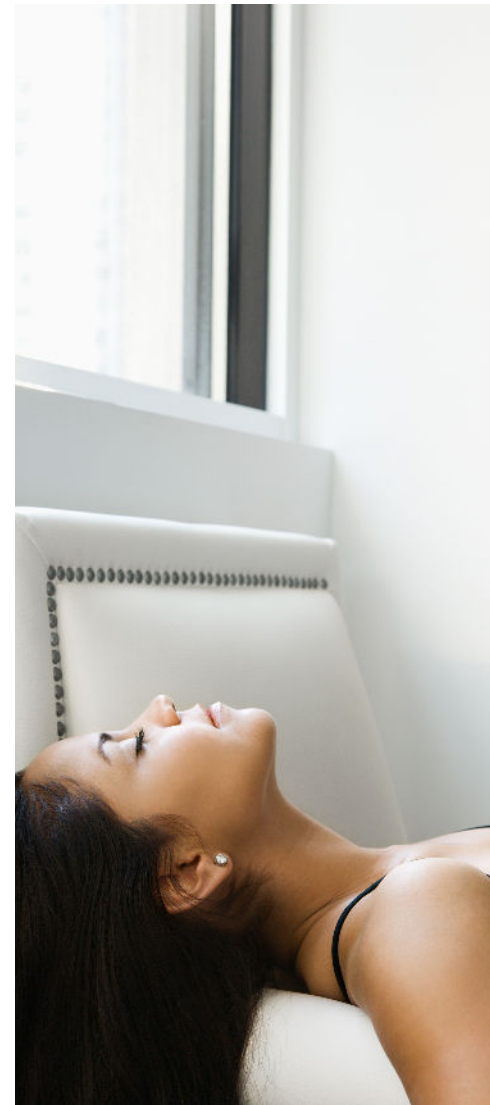
A GROWING BODY OF EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT CERTAIN TECHNIQUES CAN HELP EASE HOT FLASHES, INCLUDING:

1 Mindfulness Meditation

This type of meditation has you focus on what's happening from moment to moment. Although not shown to relieve hot flashes, it might reduce how much they bother you.

2 Acupuncture

Some studies indicate that acupuncture might reduce the frequency and severity of hot flashes, but results are conflicting, with many studies showing improvements in both active and control groups, but no difference between the two groups.



09 Alternative Medicine... cont.

3 Hypnosis

Some research indicates that hypnosis might help relieve hot flashes.

4 Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Some evidence indicates that this type of talk therapy (psychotherapy) might help you cope better with hot flashes.



Dietary Supplements 10

People often assume that "natural" products cause no harm. However, all supplements may have potentially harmful side effects, and supplements can also interact with medications you're taking for other medical conditions. Always review what you're taking with your doctor.

Dietary supplements commonly used for menopause symptoms include:

1 Plant Estrogens

Asian women, who consume soy regularly, are less likely to report hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms than are women in other parts of the world. One reason might be related to the estrogen-like compounds in soy. However, studies have generally found little or no benefit with soy, although research is ongoing to determine whether specific components of soy, such as genistein, help hot flashes.

2 Black Cohosh

Black cohosh has been popular among many women with menopausal symptoms. Studies of black cohosh's effectiveness have had mixed results, and the supplement might be harmful to the liver in rare circumstances.

11 Dietary Supplements... cont.

3 Ginseng

While ginseng may help with mood symptoms and insomnia, it doesn't appear to reduce hot flashes.

5 Vitamin E

Taking a vitamin E supplement might offer some relief from mild hot flashes. In high doses, it can increase your risk of bleeding.

4 Dong Quai

Study results indicate that dong quai isn't effective for hot flashes. The supplement can increase the effectiveness of blood-thinning medications, which can cause bleeding problems.

Treatments To Consider 12

If your hot flashes are frequent and interfere with sleep or daily life, your doctor may suggest hormone replacement therapy to supplement your declining estrogen. Because some evidence links hormone replacement therapy used for as little as five years with increased risk of strokes, blood clots, heart disease, and invasive breast cancer, you'll want to review your medical history thoroughly with your doctor to decide whether HRT is a good option for you. A high-blood pressure medication called clonidine is also helpful in some cases. And finally, some studies indicate that various antidepressants (like venlafaxine and paroxetine) can also reduce the frequency of hot flashes in some women.

HERE'S SOME TREATMENT OPTIONS THAT MAY BE AVAILABLE TO YOU:

1 Hormone Therapy

Estrogen is the primary hormone used to reduce hot flashes. Women who have had a hysterectomy can take estrogen alone. But if you still have a uterus, you should take progesterone with estrogen to protect against cancer of the lining of the uterus (endometrial cancer).

With either regimen, the therapy needs to be tailored to your needs. Guidelines suggest using the smallest effective dose for symptom control. How long you use the treatment depends on the balance of your risks and benefits from hormone therapy. The goal is to optimize your quality of life.

A combination drug of bazedoxifene with conjugated estrogens has been approved for treating menopausal symptoms. This drug might not increase your risk of uterine cancer and might protect your bones.

Estrogen therapy isn't a good option if you've had a blood clot or breast cancer.

13 Treatments To Consider ...cont.

2 Antidepressants

A low-dose form of paroxetine is the only non-hormone treatment for hot flashes approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Other antidepressants that have been used to treat hot flashes include:

- Venlafaxine
- Paroxetine
- Fluoxetine

These medications aren't as effective as hormone therapy for severe hot flashes, but they can be helpful to women who can't use hormones. Possible side effects include nausea, dizziness, weight gain, dry mouth or sexual dysfunction.

3 Other medications that might offer relief for some women include:

- Gabapentin is an anti-seizure medication that's moderately effective in reducing hot flashes. Side effects can include drowsiness, dizziness and headaches.
- Clonidine a pill or patch typically used to treat high blood pressure, might provide some relief from hot flashes. Side effects include dizziness, drowsiness, dry mouth and constipation.

4 Nerve Block Procedure

A procedure known as stellate ganglion block has shown promise for treating moderate to severe hot flashes, but more research is needed. It involves injecting an anesthetic into a nerve cluster in the neck. The treatment has been used for pain management. Side effects include pain and bruising at the injection site.

