

HOT FLASH FAST FAQS



[Creative Commons license: cc-by-NC-ND 3.0 ; author unknown](#)

WHAT IS A HOT FLASH?

A hot flash is a sudden rush of intense heat in the chest, neck and face causing flushing and profuse sweating. Hot flashes, also known as hot flushes, last 1-5 minutes and can occur several times a day to several times an hour. Hot flashes that occur during the night are called night sweats.

WHO GETS HOT FLASHES?

Midlife women and younger women in early menopause! Hot flashes and night sweats are common early symptoms of menopause-related hormone changes. About 85% of women experience hot flashes or night sweats during perimenopause. Most women find them annoying but manageable, however up to 15% of women experience severe debilitating symptoms affecting sleep and daily life.

WHAT CAUSES HOT FLASHES?

By age 45, the ovaries become less efficient in producing estrogen and most women begin to experience menstrual changes caused by hormonal fluctuations. Some months the ovaries might release a lot of estrogen, and other months very little. Estrogen regulates our inner thermostat known as the thermoregulatory zone. The thermoregulatory zone keeps our core body temperature stable and allows us to tolerate temperature changes within a certain "zone" for a period of time without changing our core body temperature. When estrogen levels decline, our thermoregulatory zone narrows,

resulting in poorer tolerance to small temperature changes from exercise, weather or even hot foods. Sweating allows us to release heat quickly to keep our core body temperature stable.

HOW LONG DO HOT FLASHES LAST?

Hot flashes are considered a “hallmark symptom” of perimenopause most often starting in a woman’s mid-40s. Symptoms of hot flashes and night sweats can continue 5-7 years or longer until women have completed the menopause transition. A woman reaches menopause after she has gone 12 months without a menstrual period. Hot flashes and night sweats usually subside within two years after menopause.

WHAT ARE OTHER RISK FACTORS FOR HOT FLASHES?

Although 85% of women will experience hot flashes or night sweats to some degree, some women may have risk factors predisposing them to more frequent and bothersome hot flash symptoms when they enter mid-life. Risk factors for more severe symptoms include women with a history of thyroid disease, auto-immune disease, cancer, obesity, or other diseases and/or infections. Women who have had total hysterectomies (without hormone replacement therapy) and women on medications that interfere with estrogen may also experience worse symptoms. Certain lifestyle factors can contribute to worsening symptoms too including cigarette smoking, alcohol, warm environments, hot drinks, spicy foods, and high levels of stress.

WHAT ARE THE MEDICAL TREATMENTS FOR HOT FLASHES?

Treatment is based on symptom severity, risk factors, and personal preferences. Prescription options can be discussed with your physician. Hormone replacement therapy (such as oral birth control pills) has strong evidence for effectively managing symptoms with low risk for cancer in younger women without certain health conditions. Some prescription medications for anxiety, depression, convulsions, neuropathic pain and other problems have been shown to also be effective in treating hot flashes.

WHAT ARE ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS FOR HOT FLASHES?

Some botanical dietary supplements contain phytoestrogens, foods with estrogen-like qualities. These may not be as effective as prescription medicines and are not regulated by the FDA, so women who want to explore botanicals should check for interactions with medications, side effects, and always purchase from a reliable source such as a health food store. Botanicals such as black cohosh, ginkgo biloba, motherwort, red clover, and soy have evidence in small studies for safely reducing hot flashes. Check for interactions with other medications here: <https://www.webmd.com/interaction-checker/default.htm>

WHAT SHOULD I EAT TO REDUCE HOT FLASHES?

Avoid processed foods and supplements with additives because those ingredients may interfere with estrogen levels. Limit caffeine, soda, and foods high in sodium or sugar. Try eating a healthy balanced diet heavy in cruciferous vegetables and at least two servings of fruit daily. Phytoestrogens should be from organic non-GMO sources. Maintain a healthy weight and drink filtered water if possible. Avoid dietary triggers such as spicy foods, hot drinks, and diet pills. Adequate B vitamins and 800 mg of Vitamin E daily may also be helpful.

CAN EXERCISE CAUSE A HOT FLASH?

Yes and no. Exercise is a proven stress reliever and helps maintain metabolism, a process that keeps our hormone levels in balance. However, vigorous aerobic exercise can increase our inner thermostat through increasing our heart rate and setting off a hot flash. Women still need strenuous exercise to maintain mental and physical health benefits, but adding slow meditative breathing or yoga exercises may reduce hot flash frequency through relaxation and slowed heart rate.

WHAT ARE OTHER SURVIVAL TIPS?

Wear breathable fabrics with open collar shirts and dress in layers. Turn down the thermostat or use air conditioning, fans and personal handheld fans. Arrive early to meetings and sit in the coolest seat you can find. Keep ice water or a cold beverage nearby day and night. Take a cool shower before bed. Get a bigger bed (especially if a partner has a different body temperature). Use cotton sheets and put a cold pack under your pillow.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Track your symptoms. Everyone has different triggers, so figure out what yours are. Keep notes on...

- Your environment: Where were you when you got a hot flash?
- Time of day: When did the hot flash occur?
- Intensity: How intense were the symptoms and how long did they last?
- Food triggers: Did you eat or drink something right before your hot flash?
- Stress: How were you feeling emotionally? Were you stressed or fatigued?
- Management: What did you try to alleviate the symptoms? Did it work?