

Healthy choices can help relieve hot flashes



Some women have found low-risk lifestyle practices and remedies for management of hot flashes and night sweats to be helpful. Even if these practices do not specifically relieve hot flashes, they are very likely to benefit physical and emotional health in general. Prescription hormone therapy or nonhormone prescription drugs, which are addressed in another handout, can always be added to lifestyle approaches if desired.

Lifestyle remedies for hot flashes^{1,2}

Don't smoke – Women who smoke are more likely to have hot flashes and their hot flashes are typically more severe. Women who are having trouble quitting should ask their doctor or healthcare provider for help.

Manage stress – Although stress and anxiety are often linked to hot flashes, the benefits of specific stress management techniques are mixed. That doesn't mean, however, that stress management isn't essential to optimal quality of life.

Get quality sleep – Even when experiencing sleep disruptions, going to bed and getting up at the same time every day can help with memory and mood. It's also a good idea to avoid caffeine in the afternoon.

Don't drink alcohol at all or drink only in moderation – A "nightcap" at bedtime will cause you to wake up in the middle of the night when the effects of the alcohol wear off. Alcohol also contributes to dehydration and causes fatigue the next day.

Maintain a healthy body weight – Evidence is inconclusive about the benefit of weight loss on hot flashes in overweight women. However, having obesity is a chronic disease, in and of itself, that requires long-term management. Being overweight or having obesity is associated with other serious health problems.

Exercise regularly – Exercise has not been shown to help control hot flashes, but it has numerous other health benefits. Staying physically active can help with mood and other aspects of physical and emotional well-being.

Practice self-care – Women should treat themselves better during the menopause transition. Finding new interests and opportunities for socialization is important.

Seek support – Women are encouraged to reach out to get support from other women going through menopause or from those who have completed the transition. Sharing experiences can help women realize they are not alone.

Change thoughts – Cognitive behavior therapy, a common type of talk therapy, increases awareness about negative thoughts and suggests ways to change thoughts to cope better in challenging situations, including in social situations and the workplace. Several clinical trials have shown that CBT may also benefit mood, sleep problems, quality of life and overall functioning.

Practical adjustments to help deal with hot flashes^{1, 2}**Daytime**

- Wear light and layered clothing that can be removed in layers when a hot flash occurs.
- Avoid warm rooms, hot drinks and hot and spicy foods.
- Keep cool water handy and stay hydrated.
- When a hot flash is starting, practice slow, deep breathing (paced breathing) – in through the nose and out through the mouth. Breathe more slowly than usual, only five to seven times per minute.
- Don't leave the room or try to escape in social situations. It only calls attention to the issue.
- Consider explaining to others what is going on. Say, "I'm fine. Just give me a minute. I'm just going through perimenopause."

Nighttime

- Sleep in a cool, dark, well-ventilated and quiet room. Keep a portable fan near the bed.
- Sleep on 100% cotton sheets.
- Place a large bath towel over sheets to absorb moisture in case you sweat heavily.
- Get out of bed and do whatever is helpful to cool down.
- Practice paced breathing and try to remain calm until the hot flash passes.
- Go back to bed as soon as possible. Tell yourself that you can get back to sleep.

**Activity: Identify triggers for hot flashes***

Hot flashes can be triggered. A "trigger" is a stimulus that elicits a reaction or, in this case, brings on a hot flash. To identify your triggers, keep a diary of hot flashes and note what was happening just before the flash. After a week or so, review your potential triggers to see any patterns or trends. You may be able to plan in advance to avoid or counter potential triggers, which may help you feel more in control.

Date	Time of hot flash	What happened just prior to the flash (potential trigger)?

Thinking differently about hot flashes³

How a woman thinks about hot flashes in certain situations can affect her emotions and, in turn, her reactions. These reactions can, in turn, increase the intensity of the hot flash.



Women who experience the most stress related to hot flashes tend to "catastrophize" (think the worst) about their experience. Thinking the worst about hot flashes can result in feelings of shame and emotional misery. Women who catastrophize their feelings are also likely to be the most self-critical, especially about their appearance, and have a poor body image.



Unproven remedies for hot flashes²

Numerous other remedies, including dietary supplements, botanicals, herbal therapies and even acupuncture, hypnosis and massage – to name a few—have been used to manage symptoms of hot flashes. Many of these treatments have been studied in clinical trials and have not been proven effective. And, they can be costly and may even be harmful to health. Herbs and supplements are not regulated so their true ingredients and production processes are not verified. Many have side effects and can interfere with how other medications work in the body. Women should talk with their doctor or healthcare provider before using any over-the-counter product for menopausal symptoms, including hot flashes.



Activity: Analyzing your thoughts*

Cognitive behavioral therapy teaches women to notice what goes through their mind (called their inner dialogues) when they have a hot flash so that they can identify their typical thoughts, especially overly negative thinking, then work on developing calmer, self-supporting responses to hot flashes.

Below are some common negative, self-defeating thoughts about hot flashes. Can you replace the negative thought with a more calming, self-supportive thought? Add any thoughts that you frequently have and try to think of a new, more positive response.³

Ask yourself these questions to analyze your thoughts:

- What is actually true about the situation?
- How might you be exaggerating your thoughts and feelings (making them catastrophic)?
- What is the worst thing that could happen? How likely is that to happen?
- What is probable or likely to happen?
- What is a self-supporting alternative thought that could help you feel more in control?

Situation	Negative, self-defeating thoughts about hot flashes	New positive, self-supporting thoughts about hot flashes
Feel a hot flash coming on in a public place	“Everyone is looking at me. I feel so embarrassed.” “I will leave the room before someone sees me.”	Example: “I can cope by practicing deep breathing. If I relax, it will go away soon. No one will notice.”
Hot flash interrupts sleep	“That hot flash was terrible. I’ll never get back to sleep.” “I’m going to be so tired tomorrow. I will probably miss work.”	
After several hot flashes	“My coworkers will think badly of me.” “I look awful.” and “These hot flashes will go on forever.”	

References:

1. Casper, RF. Patient education: Non-estrogen treatments for menopausal symptoms (Beyond the Basics), October 24, 2023. www.uptodate.com
2. The North American Menopause Society. The Menopause Guidebook, 9th Edition, 2020. www.menopause.org
3. Hunter M and Smith M in collaboration with the British Menopause Society. Women's Health Concern Fact Sheet - Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) for menopausal symptoms, February 2023. www.womens-health-concern.org

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