Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Managing Your Hot Flashes Without Hormones

This information will describe what hot flashes are, and help you find ways to manage them without using hormones.

About Hot Flashes

A hot flash is a feeling of intense heat that isn't caused by an outside source. Hot flashes usually start as a warm feeling in your face, neck, chest, or back, which may spread to your entire body. You may also have sweating, reddening of your skin (flushing), a faster heartbeat, and tingling in your fingers.

Hot flashes may last a few seconds to several minutes (usually no longer than 10 minutes). Some people have 1 or 2 hot flashes a day while others have many every hour.

Hot flashes may start suddenly during the day and may wake you up at night.

Causes of Hot Flashes

Changes in your hormone levels can cause hot flashes. This may happen during cancer treatment or when you're getting treatment to prevent cancer because the treatments can affect hormone levels. For women, hot flashes may be a natural part of menopause (permanent end of menstrual cycles).

How to Manage Hot Flashes

Hot flashes may be hard to live with, but there are things you can do to help manage them.

Avoid triggers

Triggers are actions that may cause hot flashes. While you won't be able to prevent hot flashes completely, try to avoid things that may start them, such as:

- Smoking cigarettes, e-cigarettes, or being around smoke
- Drinking coffee or other caffeinated drinks
- Eating spicy foods
- Drinking alcohol
- Feeling stressed
- Hot weather or a hot room

Keep track of your triggers

Try keeping a journal to write down your symptoms. Write down what you were doing, eating, drinking, feeling or wearing when a hot flash started. You may start to see a pattern that can help you avoid certain triggers.

Use this example of a hot flash journal or create your own.

Date/Time	What was I doing?	Eating or drinking?	Feeling?	Wearing?	How long did it last?
Example: 08/25/18; 1:30 p.m.	Walking outside	Nothing	Too warm, tired. Happy.	A dress	5 minutes

Dress comfortably

- Wear clothing made of cotton or other lightweight materials.
- Dress in layers of lightweight clothing so you can take off a layer of clothing if you have a hot flash.
- Wear loose-fitting, cotton pajamas or no clothing to bed to stay cool.

Keep cool

- Sip ice water at the start of a hot flash.
- Lower the room temperature, if you can, to something comfortable for you.
- Use fans or air conditioning when possible. Hand-held fans are useful in the workplace or when you're out.
- Sleep near an open window.
- Change your bed sheets to lighter fabrics, such as cotton, linen, or jersey.
- Use a Chillow®, which is a special cooling pillow that can help with sleep. You can buy one online or search online to find stores near you that carry them.

- Avoid taking hot baths or showers.

Exercise

Doing some form of exercise each day such as walking, dancing or yoga, can help you reduce stress and manage your hot flashes.

Do deep breathing exercises

Deep breathing is an exercise that can help you relax. Doing these exercises a few times a day or right before you feel a hot flash coming on may make them less severe. Breathing exercises may also help reduce the number of hot flashes you get each day.

Here are instructions on how to do deep breathing exercises:

1. To start, sit comfortably in a chair, lie in your bed, or on a yoga mat.
2. Place 1 hand on your stomach, just above your belly button. If you're right-handed, use your right hand. If you're left-handed, use your left hand.
3. Breathe out completely through your mouth.
4. If you can, close your eyes and breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. Feel your stomach push up on your hand. Imagine that air is filling your whole body from the bottom up.
5. Pause for a couple of seconds. Then, breathe out slowly through your mouth or nose. Try to breathe out completely and imagine the air leaving your lungs, mouth, or nose.
6. As you breathe out, allow your body to relax and go limp—like a rag doll.
7. Repeat this exercise 5 to 10 times.

Treatment for Hot Flashes

There are also many treatments that can help you manage your hot flashes. If you find that your hot flashes are making it hard for you to do your day to day activities, talk with a member of your healthcare team. They can help you find the treatment that's right for you.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Hormone replacement therapy is usually not an option for people who have had certain cancers. This is because many cancer treatments try to lower your hormone levels, and taking hormone replacements would increase your hormone levels, making your treatment less effective.

Herbal supplements

Herbal supplements haven't been proven to be a useful treatment for hot flashes. Some herbal supplements may affect your cancer treatment because they can affect your hormone levels, as hormone therapy replacement would.

If you're thinking about trying herbal remedies, visit MSK's Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service website for more information about herbs at www.aboutherbs.com. There you can find information about what different herbs are used for and what the research says about them.

Always talk with your healthcare provider before taking any herbal supplements.

Therapies offered by Integrative Medicine

MSK's Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service has many services that may help you manage hot flashes without using hormones, such as:

- **Acupuncture.** Acupuncture is a form of treatment done by inserting thin needles to certain points of the body.
- **Meditation.** Meditation is the practice of looking inside yourself to develop a relaxed and clear mind
- **Hypnosis.** A trained therapist does hypnosis. The therapist will help you get into a calm and relaxed state to help you find ways to cope and manage your symptoms

To learn more about the many services that Integrative Medicine and Wellness Service has to complement (go along with) traditional medical care, and for prices, call 646-449-1010 or visit: www.mskcc.org/IntegrativeMedicine.

Medication

If hot flashes are a problem for you and other methods haven't helped, you should talk to your healthcare provider about trying medication.

Certain medications may help if your hot flashes are hard to manage. Your healthcare provider may suggest medications that weren't made for controlling hot flashes but can be effective against them. These may include:

- Antidepressants, such as venlafaxine (Effexor®), paroxetine (Paxil®), or fluoxetine (Prozac®), citalopram (Celexa®), escitalopram (Lexapro®)
- Antiseizure medications, such as gabapentin (Neurontin®)
- Oxybutynin (Oxytrol®, Ditropan XL®) which is also used to treat overactive bladder.

Before taking any of these medications, be sure to ask your healthcare provider about possible side effects and how they might affect your cancer treatment.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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