

Natural Help for Hot Flashes

By Andrea Lamont Tamari

Considered by many to be the hallmark of menopause, hot flashes are the most common menopausal symptom in Western society. In fact, hot flashes affect an estimated 85 percent of menopausal women. A hot flash is a feeling of warmth, sometimes associated with flushing, that spreads over the body and that may be accompanied by perspiration. Hot flashes can last from 30 seconds to as long as 30 minutes. There is no way to predict when hot flashes will cease in an individual; however, they decrease in frequency with time.

Menopause is a transitional period marking the time when ovulation ceases in a woman's body. This time of change may last anywhere from a few months to several years. Hot flashes are brought on as a woman's body tries to adapt to declining estrogen levels. This decline impacts the temperature control centre of the brain. In an attempt to cool itself, the body releases heat by increasing blood flow to the surface of the skin. A sensation of heat is experienced, often accompanied by perspiration and a speeding of the heart, followed by a drop in body temperature. Warm weather, spicy foods, sugar, stress, smoking, caffeine and alcohol can all trigger hot flashes.

More and more women are searching for alternative treatments for menopausal symptoms, especially with the recent concern regarding hormone replacement therapy. Fortunately, natural methods such as supplementation, nutrition, acupuncture and exercise can offer significant relief for many women.

Hot flash helpers

Black cohosh, an herb from the buttercup family, has been used extensively in Europe by generations of women.

This herb often provides effective relief from hot flashes and other symptoms of

menopause including anxiety, heart palpitations and headaches.

Red clover is a source of isoflavones—plant derived estrogen-like compounds that behave like weak forms of your body's own estrogen. Recent studies have suggested that red clover may reduce the severity of hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms.

Taking 400 IU of vitamin E daily significantly reduces the occurrence and severity of hot flashes and provides the additional benefit of strengthening the immune system and protecting the heart.

Eating a nutritious diet

A healthful diet can provide significant benefits to women suffering from hot flashes. Hot and spicy foods, caffeinated beverages, alcohol, chocolate and aged cheeses can all trigger hot flashes. If your hot flashes seem to be worse after consuming these foods, try eliminating the offenders and see if the hot flashes subside. Scientists have observed that women who have an abundance of whole soy beans or tofu in their diet (for example, women in Asian countries) are less likely to experience hot flashes and other bothersome menopausal symptoms. Aim for two servings a day of whole soy foods, such as tempeh, edamame, tofu and miso.

Traditional Chinese medicine

According to Chinese medical theory, menopause occurs when a woman's body begins to preserve blood and energy in order to sustain her vitality and allow for the maximum available nourishment for her body. Blood is conserved and cycled through the body to nourish the spirit and extend her longevity. Acupuncturists have the ability to detect energetic changes that occur in the body and relieve symptoms such as hot flashes. Evidence that acupuncture has been used for women's health can be found in early medical literature dating back thousands of years. The key to treatment is realizing that each woman with hot flashes is unique and therefore treatments must be completely individualized.

Staying physically active

Daily exercise is very important during the menopausal years and beyond. Women who are under or over a healthy weight may experience more frequent and more intense hot flashes. If you aren't already exercising regularly, now is the time to increase your level of physical activity. Aim for 30 minutes or more of vigorous physical exercise most days of the week.

Many women find that meditation, relaxation exercises and yoga can help reduce hot flashes. Additionally, research has shown that slow, controlled deep rhythmic breathing—known as paced respiration—practised twice daily is an effective way to curb hot flashes.

By incorporating a few key lifestyle changes, it is possible to turn down the heat on hot flashes. Women can now look forward to this time in their life as a revolutionary opportunity for personal growth, renewal and transformation.



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