What Can I Do to Deal With Menopausal Hot Flashes?

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Understanding Hot Flashes

It is no great secret that hot flashes are a part of life for women – but what exactly causes them? And are there better ways to live through them, rather than just *living through them?*

Here's the deal on flashes, ladies.

What Causes Hot Flashes?

To put it simply, a hot flash is *exactly* what it sounds like – a sudden feeling of heat to the body. It typically occurs to the face and the torso. It may cause reddening of the skin as well as the feeling of warmth and even sweating.

Hot flashes can occur because of several medical conditions but are mostly associated with menopause. So how does menopause cause hot flashes?

Well, the cause isn't *exactly* known. However, scientists hypothesize that the lack of estrogen associated with menopause plays a pretty big factor; during menopause, estrogen levels plummet. As the estrogen levels begin to decrease, the hypothalamus (a tiny gland in the brand that regulates body temperature) is thought to be affected.

This reduction in estrogen may cause the brain to detect too much body heat – which triggers more hormones to be released. These hormones trigger an increase in heart rate, which then pumps more blood. Eventually, sweat is produced – which is our body's natural cooling mechanism.

And thus – flashes are thought to occur!

How Long Do Hot Flashes Last?

According to Harvard Health, about 80% of women will experience flashes as they go through menopause.

And at one point in time, it was estimated that hot flashes occurred for 6 to 24 months before ceasing to occur. However, new research indicates that hot flashes occur for a much longer period of time – actually for 7 to 11 *years.*

These figures were calculated due to a long-term research study. This study was the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN), which studied women of different ethnicities and races who were menopausal.

The study was able to pinpoint several interesting things – for example, women with a longer duration of hot flashes were more likely to be smokers (current or ex-smokers), be overweight, or have mental health disorders, such as depression and/or anxiety.

How to Get Rid of Hot Flashes Naturally

There are a variety of natural remedies for hot flashes and staying cool at night.

For example, deep breathing techniques can reduce a hot flash if the deep breathing is begun at the onset of the hot flash.

Other techniques include dressing in layers, lowering the thermostat, and avoiding beverages that are known to induce flashes, such as alcohol, hot beverages, and caffeine. In addition, utilizing stress reduction techniques are beneficial, such as meditation and mindfulness.

Acupuncture may also be useful for reducing flashes. There have been studies that evaluate the use of acupuncture for the use of flashes. The studies are conflicting, but some of the evidence is promising.

Hypnosis may also be a promising treatment modality for the relief of hot flashes.

Several supplements may be effective in treating hot flashes:

- **Plant estrogens.** This includes eating soy in the diet. Studies indicate that Asian women, who consume a diet rich in soy, seem to be less likely to report hot flashes. There are ongoing studies to evaluate whether soy in the diet may be the reason.
- **Black cohosh.** A much-hailed supplement for the use of hot flashes, this herb may be effective – but it also may be harsh on the liver. Use with caution – and discuss with your physician before taking it.
- **Dong quai.** Another supplement that is thought to be effective for hot flashes, studies actually indicate that dong quai is *not effective.* In fact, it can increase the effectiveness of blood thinning medications, causing bleeding problems. Use this medication with caution as well.

Traditional Menopausal Hot Flash Relief

The most effective treatment for hot flashes is estrogen supplementation. However, there are risks associated with estrogen therapy.

For women who have had a hysterectomy, estrogen is taken alone. Women without a hysterectomy can take estrogen with progesterone, which protects against endometrial cancer. The recommendation for both therapies is to use the smallest dose to control symptoms.

Estrogen therapy is contraindicated in women who have had a prior blood clot or who have had breast cancer.

There are other ways to treat flashes. For example:

- **Antidepressants.** Paroxetine (Brisdelle) is the only antidepressant approved by the FDA to treat hot flashes, but others have been used as well. Antidepressants may not be as effective as estrogen therapy but are a good substitute for women who choose not to take hormones, or who are not candidates for estrogen therapy.
- **Gabapentin (Neurontin).** This medication has been shown to be moderately effective in reducing flashes.
- **Clonidine (Catapres).** A pill or a patch can provide some relief against flashes.