

Hot Flushes and Night Sweats

my menopause support programme

Menopause is the time when a woman's periods stop. It is a gradual process affecting women physically and psychologically.

Hot flushes and night sweats (also known as vasomotor symptoms) are the most common symptoms and a 2016 national study by the British Menopause Society found that 79% of women with menopausal symptoms suffered from hot flushes and 70% lived with night sweats.



For these women, these symptoms can cause tiredness, fatigue, low mood, decreased cognitive function ultimately leading to low self-esteem.

Hot flushes and night sweats are due to lack of oestrogen circulating through the body. During peri-menopause (that's the start of the menopausal transition which can start years before your final period), women experience hot flushes and night sweats just before their period due to drops in oestrogen levels but these symptoms are at their worst post-menopause, when periods have stopped completely.

Women often describe hot flushes as a creeping feeling of intense warmth that quickly spreads across your whole body and face.

What can women do to reduce their symptoms?



Lose weight – having a BMI greater than 25 can cause a higher frequency of hot flushes and night sweats. Numerous studies have shown losing weight decreases hot flushes and night sweats.



Mediterranean type diet – a 2013 study found that eating more fruit, vegetables and pasta whilst reducing red meat consumption reduces hot flushes and night sweats.



Increase Vitamin B6 intake – eating more eggs, veg and oily fish can also protect the cardiovascular system.

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Exercise – a recent study found that resistance training (using light weights to strengthen muscles) can alleviate hot flushes and night sweats by 40%.



Alcohol – drinking more than recommended guidelines or 1 or 2 small glasses of wine a day increases night sweats in particular.



Smoking – recent studies have found that smokers have worse hot flushes and night sweats than non-smokers. They also have an increased risk of cardiovascular problems and osteoporosis.

What can women do to reduce their symptoms? continued

CBT – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (a combination of individual and group psycho-educational sessions) can lead to better stress management, paced breathing and mindfulness.

Natural remedies - these can help, but be aware that they are not regulated, so it's difficult to decide what dose is safe. Phytoestrogens (compounds that naturally occur in plants) have been shown to be better than nothing in reducing hot flushes and night sweats, and they are safe to take with few side effects.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)- the gold standard in the treatment of hot flushes and night sweats (if you are able to take it).

Antidepressants known as SSRI's - in women who can't take HRT, these can help. Venlafaxine 75mg, Citalopram and Fluoxetine have been proven to help but should only be used in the short-term.

Acupuncture - has also been shown to help hot flushes and night sweats.

Kind contributed by Hazel Hayden (AHP and Nurse Team Manager)

General ideas to reduce hot flushes and night sweats

You can try these tips to ease your symptoms:

- Cut out or reduce coffee and tea
- Stop smoking
- Keep the room cool and use a fan (electric or handheld) if necessary
- If you feel a flush coming on, spray your face with cool water or use a cold gel pack (available from pharmacies)
- Wear loose layers of light cotton or silk
- clothes so you can easily take some clothes off if you overheat
- Have layers of sheets on the bed, rather than a duvet, so you can remove them as you need to
- Cut down on alcohol
- Sip cold or iced drinks
- Have a lukewarm shower or bath instead of a hot one.

Tips to ease the symptoms of hot flushes



- Reduce coffee and tea
- Stop smoking
- Keep the room cool
- Wear loose layers of light clothing

For more tips on managing hot flushes, see the NHS website

next topic: *Vaginal Dryness and Sexual Problems*

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