

Easy ways to reduce hot flashes and get more sleep

Sudden drops in estrogen send the body's thermostat into overdrive, causing hot flashes typical of menopause. Blood vessels in the skin expand, drawing more blood to the skin tissues and making them hot for 30 seconds to 5 minutes.

Many things can trigger hot flashes. Triggers are different for everyone. To learn what causes yours, keep a hot flash notebook. Write down the time of day of each hot flash, where it happened, what happened during it (for example, "face bright red, blouse soaked"), how long the episode lasted, how bad it was on a scale of 1 to 10, and anything you ate, drank, or did during the half an hour before it started. After a week, look for patterns. Try the steps below until you find what works for you.

Your environment and what you wear

- Wear loose-fitting, natural-fiber clothing (cotton, linen, silk).
- Dress in layers so you can remove the top layer if you feel flushed.
- Keep your home cool, especially your bedroom.
- Take a small fan to work.
- Sleep in 100% cotton night wear, and use 100% cotton sheets.
- Be aware that hot, humid weather can exacerbate hot flashes.

What and when you eat

- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Drink plenty of water. At business meetings or social engagements, keep a pitcher or glass of ice water handy to cool off any hot flashes that may strike. Sucking an ice cube may stop a hot flash.
- Notice whether specific foods affect you. Some that commonly cause hot flashes are coffee, tea, other hot drinks, soft drinks containing caffeine, red wine, aged cheeses, spicy dishes, citrus

fruits, and tomatoes. Avoid any foods that are problems for you, particularly after 4 PM.

- Don't drink alcohol at night. It may trigger hot flashes and disturb your sleep.
- Eating soy foods may help boost your estrogen supply. Foods like miso, tofu, and soy nuts are great sources—soy oil and soy sauce are not!

Your habits

- Get some exercise.
- Take a cool 20-minute bath in the morning—it may keep you flush-free all day. Consider a cool bath or shower or a walk in the cool night air before going to bed.
- Explore stress-reduction techniques such as biofeedback, guided imagery, massage, meditation, muscle relaxation exercises, and yoga.
- Calm, deep breathing helps many women. Take deep, slow breaths that start in your abdomen—take 5 seconds to breathe in and 5 seconds to breathe out. Take 6-8 of these per minute. Practice 15 minutes twice a day and whenever a hot flash starts.

Learn as much as you can

- There are many books that suggest ways to treat symptoms of menopause. Ask your doctor to recommend some, or browse the women's health section of your favorite bookstore.
- Sign up for a newsletter on women's health. One example: *Harvard Women's Health Watch*, Box 420234, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0234.
- Consider joining a support group. You can find out if there's one near you by contacting the North American Menopause Society, Box 94527, Cleveland, OH 44106 (216) 844-8748.
- Scan the World Wide Web for information. Start with the North American Menopause Society site at <http://www.menopause.org>