

Hot Flashes

What are they?

Hot flashes are a common symptom of menopause. Many women (especially those being treated for breast, ovarian, or other gynecologic cancers) experience early or temporary menopause from cancer treatment. This occurs as a result of surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, or hormonal treatments—such as tamoxifen, Arimidex® (anastrozole), or Femara® (letrozole).

Men with prostate cancer may experience hot flashes during *hormone therapy treatment* with Lupron® (leuprolide) and Eligard® (leuprolide).

What are the symptoms?

During a hot flash:

- Your face and upper body become hot, red, and sweaty.
- Your heart beats faster, dilating your blood vessels.
- You perspire more in an effort to cool your body.

How are they diagnosed?

Hot flashes are diagnosed based on a description of your symptoms.

How are they treated?

If you have an estrogen receptor-positive breast cancer, it's highly unlikely that your doctor will treat you with the typical therapy for menopausal hot flashes—estrogen therapy. Other options include:

Lifestyle approaches: Wearing layers of clothes, keeping rooms cooler, and learning relaxation techniques can help you manage hot flashes.

Antidepressants: There is some evidence that low doses of certain antidepressants, such as Effexor® (venlafaxine), Prozac® (fluoxetine), and Paxil® (paroxetine) can help with hot flashes in women with breast cancer.

Other medications: Medications such as the anti-seizure drug Neurontin® (gabapentin) and the antihypertensive Catapres® (clonidine) have also been shown to significantly reduce hot flashes in women with breast cancer. Bellergal is another medication frequently used.

Complementary therapies: These include the herb black cohosh, soy supplements, vitamin E, homeopathy, and acupuncture. Clinical trials on the effectiveness of these approaches are mixed, however. Regardless of what you try, make sure you talk to your doctor first. Some approaches, such as soy preparations, may increase estrogen levels, fueling the breast cancer, while some herbs may interfere with other medications.



TIPS

Tips to Help

Lifestyle changes can help you manage hot flashes. These include:

- Limiting spicy food, alcohol, and caffeine, all of which can trigger hot flashes.
- Dressing in layers of natural-fiber clothing during the day.
- Keeping your home or workplace cool.
- Sleeping in the nude with a fan blowing on you.
- Keeping ice water handy.
- Taking frequent cool showers.
- Practicing deep breathing and other relaxation exercises when a flash begins.

Words to Know

Complementary therapies: Herbal, nutritional, and lifestyle approaches to managing medical conditions.

Hormone therapy treatment: Cancer treatment that blocks the action or production of estrogen or testosterone so they can't fuel the growth of cancers.