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Cancer Institute



**BRIGHAM AND
WOMEN'S HOSPITAL**

DANA-FARBER/BRIGHAM AND WOMEN'S CANCER CENTER

Hot flashes and excessive sweating

Women going through menopause often experience hot flashes. Chemotherapy may bring on premature (early) menopause. Menopause may also be induced intentionally by medications. Hot flashes can also be encountered without menopause – for example Tamoxifen often causes hot flashes even in women who still have their periods. Hot flashes happen when blood vessels (in the head and neck in particular) open wider than usual and allow more blood to flow through. This results in sudden and intense heat sensations.

Hot flashes can lead to sweating, redness, or a racing heart. They can last from a few seconds up to 10 minutes, but on average, they last about 4 minutes. Here are some ways to ease the discomfort:

Avoid triggers that may lead to hot flashes. It helps to figure out if you have triggers and what they are. They are unique to each woman, but common examples are:

- Stress
- Spicy foods
- Caffeine
- Diet pills
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- Hot showers, hot tubs, saunas
- Hot weather

Keep your body temperature cool.

- Wear loose clothing. Dress in layers.
- Wear clothing made from natural fibers – not synthetic materials. Aim for natural fibers that absorb moisture from the skin and dry quickly.
- Keep a bottle of cool water with you.
- Keep a small fan at your desk or bedside table.
- Keep a hand fan with you.
- At the first sign of a hot flash: Splash your face with cold water; run cold water over your hands; or place a cold, wet washcloth against your neck.
- Take a cool shower before bed.
- Sleep on cotton sheets and with one foot sticking out from under the covers.
- Use air conditioning or a ceiling fan to keep the room temperature cool.



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Exercise and maintain a healthy body weight. Not only is physical activity good for your general health, it can also reduce hot flashes.

Try alternative treatments. Practice relaxation and stress reduction techniques, such as yoga, meditation, or breathing exercises. Try biofeedback therapy, acupuncture, or vitamin and mineral supplements approved by your doctor.

Ask about medication. If none of these suggestions work, medications such as oxybutynin, gabapentin, venlafaxine, or escitalopram might help. Talk with your doctor about the best options for you