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ARTICLE • WOMEN & MIDLIFE

## 7 Effective Ways to Reduce Hot Flashes

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Mention menopause to anyone, and hot flashes are what they'll likely think of first. Interestingly, experts aren't exactly sure why hot flashes (also known as vasomotor symptoms) occur and why most women ([about 80 percent](#)) experience them as they go through menopause.

"We think hot flashes are caused by dysregulation in the part of the brain called the hypothalamus due to a drop in estrogen," says Sarah Yamaguchi, M.D., an ob/gyn in Los Angeles.

While these sweat-inducing episodes tend to ease over time, experiencing a flash can be debilitating in the moment.

"The sensation usually starts suddenly in the upper body and face, and then spreads out over the rest of the body," describes Yamaguchi.

Hot flashes can begin with a feeling of being very hot, then will often lead to sweating and shivering, and can be associated with heart palpitations and anxiety. They can occur just occasionally or several times a day, and they tend to be more severe during the hot summer months. Other factors that increase the severity of hot flashes include: eating spicy foods, stress, obesity, smoking, and reduced physical activity.

Not only are these symptoms often hard to deal with, they can also be part of a person's life for a very long time. In fact, the average hot flash "duration" is 7.4 years, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). And 10 percent of women will experience moderate to severe hot flashes for 10 or more years after their last menstrual period.

"Women need to be aware of this and keep in mind that if they're continuing to get hot flashes, that's not unusual," says Mary Jane Minkin, M.D., a clinical professor of obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive sciences at Yale School of Medicine in New Haven, Connecticut.

Thankfully, there are ways to prevent hot flashes and treat them if you get overheated.

### Find Your Fail-safe Ways to Cool Down

This means dressing in layers, especially during the warmer months, using fans (including handheld ones!) to cool you down, sipping cold drinks, and lowering room temperatures, Yamaguchi suggests.

### Consider Estrogen-Free OTC

Supplements If you're seeking an over-the-counter remedy for your hot flashes, consider a nonhormonal product, such as [Remifemin](#). This herbal menopause remedy contains black cohosh, said to relieve hot flashes as well as night sweats, mood swings, and irritability. [Relizen](#) is another dietary-supplement option that contains Swedish pollen extract.

There is mixed data on the effectiveness of both of these remedies, with some [studies showing improvement and some not](#). When using any herbal supplement, make sure to discuss it with your healthcare provider to ensure there won't be interactions with any of the other medications you're taking.

### Ask Your Doctor About a Prescription

To relieve unrelenting symptoms, you may want to discuss a prescription option with your healthcare provider. Estrogen replacement therapy can be prescribed in a pill or a patch. It's prescribed along with a form of progesterone that helps protect the uterus. (Without the progesterone, the estrogen could cause the uterine lining to become too thickened, which increases cancer risk.) Other non-hormonal prescription options include SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors), such as Paxil, and anti-seizure medications, such as gabapentin.

### Cool Off in Cotton

Consider swapping out clothing made with synthetic fabrics (especially nightgowns) for breathable cotton ones, Minkin says. "It's so important to wear clothes that will keep you cool when you have a flash," she says.

### Connect Your Mind and Body

There is **some evidence** that stress can contribute to hot flashes, so find methods to keep stress at bay. There's a wide range of what can work to help relieve stress, but you can't go wrong with exercise and mindfulness.

"Yoga, deep breathing, and meditation can be extremely helpful," Yamaguchi says.

Exercise and weight loss have also been **shown to be quite effective**. If you're overweight, you might consider setting a weight-loss goal of even five to 10 pounds—you will likely notice a difference in the frequency and/or severity of your hot flashes.

## Quit Smoking

Smoking is linked to an increased risk of hot flashes, and smokers have more hot flashes as they move through menopause, according to a **University of Pennsylvania study**. Now's an excellent time to quit, Minkin says. If you're unsure how, or you're having difficulty, ask your doctor for help.

## Avoid Food and Drink Triggers

Red wine, spicy food, and hot foods are known hot-flash triggers for some people. "Your goal is to avoid those triggers if they prompt a flare," Minkin says.

Everyone's menopause experience is different, including their triggers and what works to help symptoms like hot flashes. Paying attention to your body and learning what works best for you is key to thriving during this time.


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I am now 62 and pretty much done with hot flashes. They are very rare. They lasted 10 years about. I noticed when I was having them that any kind of alcohol would flare them up. Also, if I consumed a lot of simple carbohydrates day after day. If I kept my simple carbohydrates low the hot flashes weren't as bad.

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twill\_user\_8773 thank you for sharing what seemed to flare your hot flashes. This will help other members, I'm sure!

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