

Hot Flashes

What is a hot flash?

Hot flashes are sudden feelings of warmth, sweating, or flushing, often on the face or chest, that are not due to exercise or room temperature. They can vary in intensity and last from a few seconds to several minutes.

What causes hot flashes?

Hot flashes are thought to be due to a change in hormones. They are often a side effect of hormone-based treatment.

Who can get hot flashes and when can they happen?

Hot flashes can happen to both men and women. Over half of all women experience hot flashes. They can happen over many years before, during, and after menopause.

Tips to help manage hot flashes:

- **Tracking:** keep a log of how often and when they occur and give this information to your team.
- **What to wear:** cotton or other loose-fitting natural fabrics. Dress in layers you can take off as needed.
- **Keep it cool:** be sure your bedroom is cool and comfortable while you sleep. Do not take hot showers if your hot flashes increase afterwards.
- **Trigger foods/drinks:** some foods may trigger hot flashes, such as fried foods, caffeine, and alcohol.
- **Mindfulness:** mindful breathing can help with hot flashes. Try this “cooling breath” technique: If you feel a hot flash coming on, try curling the outer edges of your tongue up as you take a slow deep breath, exhale with an open mouth, repeat several times when needed. If your tongue doesn’t curl, purse your lips like you are drinking with a straw, same exhale.
- **Drink liquids:** be sure to stay hydrated. Try adding slices of cucumber or mint leaves to your water.
- **Keep moving:** some research has shown that exercise can reduce the intensity of hot flashes.

Supplements do not improve hot flashes. It is possible that certain supplements may interfere with how well your cancer treatment works. Check with your treatment team before you take any supplements.

Medications to treat hot flashes:

Talk to your treatment team if these tips aren’t working and your hot flashes are impacting your sleep, daily activities, or quality of life. We may be able to prescribe one of the following medicines:

- **Venlafaxine (Effexor):** A once daily pill, also used as an antidepressant, which helps more than half of patients with hot flashes.
- **Gabapentin (Neurontin):** A pill that can be taken from 1 to 3 times a day, helps with hot flashes and can cause drowsiness which helps some patients sleep at night.
- **Oxybutynin (Ditropan):** A twice-daily pill, also used to manage overactive bladder, which helps reduce the frequency and severity of hot flashes
- **Citalopram (Celexa):** A once daily pill, also used as an antidepressant, which helps more than half of patients with hot flashes.
- **Vitamin E 100-400 Units daily** or pure **primrose oil 500-1000mg twice daily** may also help
- Please remember hot flashes are treatable and we are here to help!