



A Teaching Affiliate
of Harvard Medical School

Managing Hot Flashes

The Center for Breast Cancer
Mass General Cancer Center



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Topics to Discuss

- Hot flashes definition
- Causes of hot flashes
- Non-drug therapies
- Drug therapies



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What is a hot flash?

- A sudden, intense, hot feeling on your face or upper body
- Often occur during menopause during hormonal changes
- Caused by hormonal imbalances (estrogen levels)
- Can be caused by inducing early menopause in women treated for breast cancer

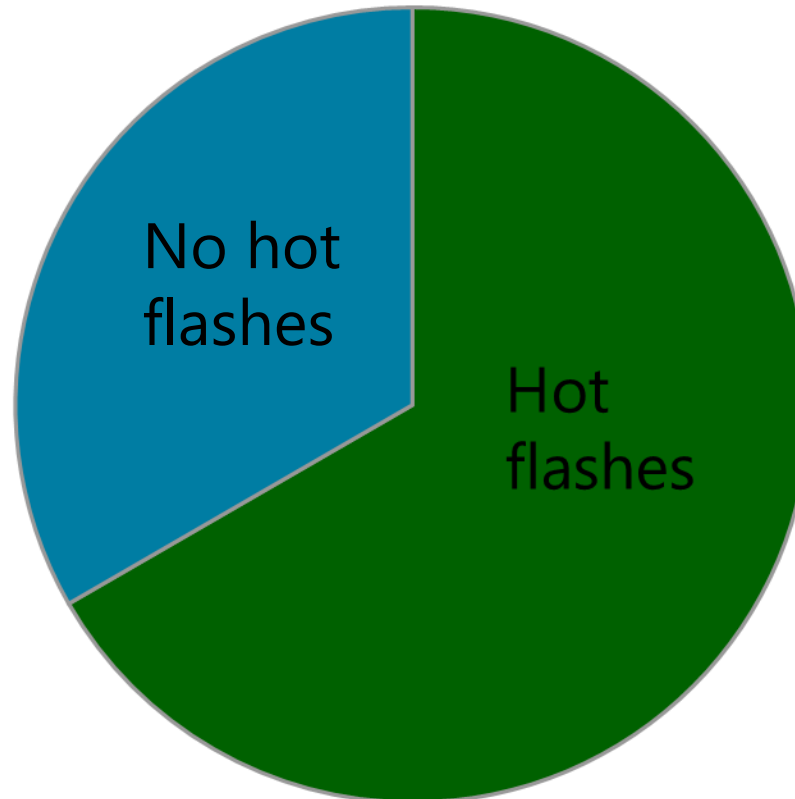


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What is a hot flash?

- Hot flashes are common. They occur in two-thirds of postmenopausal women with history of breast cancer



Symptoms of hot flashes

- Can also be accompanied by the following symptoms:
 - Rapid heartbeat
 - Sweating
 - Nausea
 - Dizziness
 - Anxiety
 - Headache
 - Weakness
 - Suffocating feeling



Potential causes of hot flashes

- Menopause
- Chemotherapy
- Endocrine therapy
 - Anastrozole
 - Letrozole
 - Exemestane
 - Tamoxifen



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Managing Side Effects: Hot flashes

- There are several non-drug therapies that can help with hot flash management.
- However, tell your treatment team if your hot flashes are bothersome. We may be able to prescribe medicine to help.
- Tell your treatment team **before** starting any herbal supplements to treat hot flashes. Some supplements should **not** be taken during and after breast cancer treatment because they can cause harm.

Hot Flashes: Non-Drug Treatment Options

Behavioral Therapy

- Manage stress/anxiety (relaxation, breathing exercises)
- Take part in mild, regular exercise
- Avoid/limit caffeine, alcohol, and spicy food, which can worsen hot flashes

Comfort Measures

- Wear removable layers or loose-fitting clothes made of cotton
- Stay in cool environment, use fans, and open windows to keep air moving

Potential Alternatives

- Acupuncture
- Hypnosis



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Hot Flashes: Drug Treatment Options

- Estrogen replacement therapy should **NOT** be used to manage hot flashes because it may increase risk of breast cancer returning.

Non-estrogen drugs we may prescribe:

- Antidepressants: venlafaxine, citalopram, and duloxetine (may interact with your medications)
- Anti-epileptics: Gabapentin, pregabalin (may also help if hot flashes are more prevalent during the night)
- Oxybutynin (mild side effects including dry mouth, abdominal pain, and mild trouble urinating)
- Daily vitamin E or pure primrose oil may also help



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Supportive Care Resources

- Yoga
- Acupuncture / Acupressure
- Massage
- Support groups
- Survivorship programs
- Workshops
- Music therapy
- To learn more about all our of Supportive Care offerings log onto: cancercenterpx.org



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Your Breast Cancer Team

- Oncologist
- Nurse Practitioner
- Pharmacist
- Oncology Social Worker
- Practice Nurse
- Infusion Nurse

Contact Information

- Phone Numbers
 - Boston: 617-726-6500
 - Waltham: 781-487-6100
 - Danvers: 978-882-6060
- Patient Portal:
 - patientgateway.org