



Hot Flashes

Natural relief for hot flashes and night sweats

Hot flashes are one of the uncomfortable symptoms that sometimes accompany menopause. There is an initial feeling of discomfort, followed by a sensation of heat moving towards the head. The face becomes flushed and red, which is followed by perspiration and fatigue. A related problem is night sweats, profuse perspiration which occurs during sleep.

Obviously, one cause of these hot flashes is a reduction in estrogen production due to the reduced activity of the ovaries. The medical answer to this is hormone replacement therapy, but estrogen drugs have many undesirable side effects, including increasing the risk of estrogen-dependent cancers.

An alternative to hormone replacement therapy is to use phytoestrogens, plant-based estrogen compounds. These have a milder activity and are helpful for reducing menopausal symptoms, like hot flashes, without increasing the risk of cancer or causing other undesirable side effects.

The most popular herb used for this purpose is black cohosh, a potent phytoestrogen that also has anti-inflammatory (heat-reducing properties). However, black cohosh can cause some side effects when taken in larger doses. (It's vasodilating tendency can contribute to vasodilative headaches or dizziness.)

Flash-Ease is a blend which helps to release the compounds in black cohosh into the blood stream more slowly, thereby reducing side effects. Flash Ease also contains dong quai, a Chinese tonic herb that is also helpful in balancing female problems.

Other herbs that have estrogen-balancing effects include hops, wild yam, chaste tree and false unicorn. C-X, Female Comfort, NF-X and FSC II (with Lobelia) are combinations of herbs like these which may be helpful with hot flashes and other menopausal symptoms. Soy, other beans, flax seeds and high lignan flax seed oil are also sources of phytoestrogens.

Estrogen production can also be stimulated by essential oils. By adding a few drops of essential oils to water in a spray bottle and shaking the bottle vigorously before spraying, one can make a hydrosol to use for cooling hot flashes. Rose and peppermint oil are two good choices. Other essential oils that can reduce hot flashes include clary sage, geranium and pink grapefruit. When you feel a hot flash coming on, simply close your eyes and mist your face with the water containing the diluted oils. This will often "cool down" hot flashes very quickly.

There is more to the issue of hot flashes than a simple loss of estrogen, however. Otherwise, why would some women experience them when other women don't. Obviously, there are factors that contribute to this problem other than just a reduced production of female hormones.

One factor that contributes significantly to hot flashes is adrenal fatigue. The adrenals are capable of producing sex hormones like estrogens, progesterone and testosterone in smaller amounts. In fact, prior to puberty, the adrenal glands make a large part of our sex hormones. Theoretically, they should take up the slack as sex hormone production falls off during menopause.

The adrenal glands may also be involved because they help to regulate inflammation and body temperature. The adrenal glands produce cortisol, a hormone which cools down inflammation and heat in the body. When the adrenals are weak or exhausted, levels of heat and inflammation can rise.

Night sweating is one of the symptoms of adrenal fatigue. Other symptoms include moodiness (unreasonable anger or sadness), absent-mindedness, fatigue, anxiety and restless sleep.

Unfortunately, due to excessive stress, sugar and caffeine consumption and nutritional deficiencies, many women's adrenal glands are exhausted by the time they reach menopause. So, supporting the adrenals may be one answer to reducing hot flashes (and other menopausal symptoms).

Licorice root can be helpful here. Not only does it have a cortisol-sparing action, it also contains phytoestrogens. Other remedies that may be helpful in easing hot flashes by supporting the adrenals include: Adrenal Support, Nervous Fatigue Formula, Pantothenic Acid, B-Complex, Vitamin C and NutriCalm.

A congested liver may also contribute to hot flashes. In Chinese medicine, there is a concept of "liver fire rising" in which heat from the liver rises up and causes flushing of the face. Some of the herbs in C-X and NF-X have liver balancing properties, but Milk Thistle Combo or other liver-cleansing and protecting formulas may also be helpful.

One final factor that may contribute to the high incidence of hot flashes in modern women is deficiencies of essential fatty acids (particularly the Omega-3 essential fatty acids). These fatty acids help to reduce heat and inflammation by contributing to the production of anti-inflammatory messengers like type 2 prostaglandins. Flax seed oil is a good source of essential fatty acids (and also contains lignans, which are phytoestrogens). However, Evening Primrose Oil and Omega-3 essential fatty acids may also be helpful.

There are many natural remedies that can help reduce or eliminate hot flashes. For more information consult your local herb specialist or one of the references below.

Selected References

The Comprehensive Guide to NSP by Tree of Light Publishing
The Complete Woman's Herbal by Anne McIntyre

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