

Supplements for Hot Flashes during Menopause

Hot flashes (vasomotor symptoms) are a common experience during menopause. Hot flashes cause a flushed sensation in the face or body. They may occur before, during, or after menopause. Often symptoms will resolve within one year of the end of menopause, but occasionally symptoms continue.

Talk to your doctor about any medications and supplements that you are taking.

Are there any supplements that can be used safely to help hot flashes?

Below is a list of supplements that may help hot flashes.

- Those that are most effective and most likely safe include soy foods or soy extract, black cohosh, and flaxseed.
 - **Soy foods or soy extract.** Some research found that women had fewer hot flashes when surveyed 12, 16 and 24 weeks after starting soy, although other research has not shown this benefit. Soy may improve the severity of the symptoms as well. **Usual dose:** for soy protein (food) is 20-60 grams and soy extract is 35-120 mg/day. Four ounces of firm tofu contains 13 grams of soy protein; one cup of soy beans contains 30 grams; one soy "burger" includes 10 - 12 grams; and an 8-ounce glass of plain soy milk contains 10 grams. **Most common side effects:** nausea, bloating, diarrhea or constipation. Do not use soy if you are allergic to it. Discuss soy use with your physician if you have a history of breast, ovarian, or uterine cancer or hormone-sensitive conditions such as endometriosis.
 - **Black cohosh.** Some research has shown that black cohosh reduced hot flashes. **Usual dose:** 20-40 mg twice a day. A common supplement brand is *Remifemin*. Each tablet contains 20 mg of black cohosh. Black cohosh may be more effective when used along with St. John's Wort (SJW). Be careful about using SJW with other drugs, since this herb can speed up metabolism and therefore cause other drugs to be less effective. **Most common side effects:** headache, dizziness, nausea. Do not use it if you have an allergy to black cohosh or other members of the Ranunculaceae (buttercup or crowfoot) family. Discuss its use with your physician if you have a history of blood clots, seizures, liver disease or high blood pressure.
 - **Flaxseed.** Some evidence suggests that flaxseed decreases hot flashes and night sweats. It is a rich source of the fiber lignan, which is an estrogen-like chemical found in plants. (The lignan is retained even when the seed is ground up). It also contains phyto or plant-based estrogen. **Usual dose:** 30-50 grams daily. One tablespoon of ground flaxseed contains approximately 15 grams. Thus most women will need 2-4 tablespoons a day to help hot flashes. **Most common side effects:** bloating, flatulence, abdominal pain, diarrhea, constipation, indigestion, and nausea. Do not use it if you have an allergy to flaxseed, flaxseed oil, or any other member of the Linaceae plant family. Do not eat raw or unripe flaxseed.



Supplements for Hot Flashes during Menopause

- There is not enough research to suggest that the following supplements will help hot flashes, but they are likely safe:
 - Red Clover,
 - St. John's Wort alone
 - DHEA (Less than 12 months). Do not use DHEA long term because it may be harmful.
 - Kudzu

Is there anything else I can do to reduce symptoms of menopause?

- Osteopathic manipulation, deep breathing exercises, massage, or yoga may improve hot flashes, night sweats, urinary frequency, depression and insomnia. All are relatively safe options.
- Remember to wear light, loose clothing in layers, which may help you to be more comfortable during hot flashes.

Where can I find more information?

More information can be found on the website for the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/menopause/>.

References:

www.naturalstandard.com Accessed on 4/18/11

www.naturaldatabase.com Accessed on 4/18/11

Nedrow, Anne. "Menopause." *Integrative Medicine*. Ed. D Rakel. 2nd Ed. Philadelphia, PA : Saunders Elsevier, 2007.

The information in this handout is for general education. It is not meant to be used by a patient alone. Please work with your health care practitioner to use this information in the best way possible to promote your health.

This handout was created by Caitlin D'Agata, MD, Resident Physician, and David Rakel, MD, Assoc. Professor and Director, Integrative Medicine Program, and edited by Charlene Luchterhand, MSSW. All three are in the Dept. of Family Medicine, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health.

Date Created: September 2011

Notes: