

# Managing hot flushes

A guide for men on hormone therapy for prostate cancer

Cancer Services

Information for patients

Produced: Jun 2021

Review: Jun 2024

Leaflet number: 775    Version: 1

## What are hot flushes?

A hot flush is a feeling of sudden waves of intense warmth that often begin in the chest area and may rise to the neck and face. They are often accompanied by excessive sweating and red blotches on the skin. Hot flushes can last for a few minutes or as long as 20 minutes and can happen either occasionally or frequently during the day and/or night.

They can be unpleasant and distressing. Hot flushes can make your body feel uncomfortably hot and can be overwhelming. They can occasionally be associated with night sweats and can reduce your sleep quality. You may also experience chills as your body temperature rises and decreases slightly as the sweat dries from the skin surface.

## Why do I get hot flushes?

Hot flushes are one of the most common side effects for men having hormone (or androgen) deprivation therapy. This therapy is an important part of prostate cancer treatment. It works by lowering the amount of testosterone in your body. This is achieved by an operation, injection or tablets. One of the side effects of lowering testosterone levels is hot flushes.

## Can I do anything to help my hot flushes?

Flushes can be triggered by certain foods or drinks and by your environment. The first step to managing your flushes is to identify any triggers, so that you can take steps to avoid them. This may reduce how often you have hot flushes or minimise their severity.

You might find it useful to keep a diary for a few days, noting what you eat and drink, and what you are doing when you experience a hot flush.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## Common triggers include:

- spicy food
- alcohol
- caffeine
- stress
- smoking
- hot rooms and hot weather.

Try to avoid food and drinks which trigger your flushes such as spicy foods, caffeine-based drinks and alcohol.

## Exercise and managing stress

Many men notice that stress increases the frequency and severity of hot flushes. There are various ways to reduce stress including relaxation, exercises, massage, meditation, acupuncture and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

## Managing your environment

Some tips that may help control hot flushes:

- Dress in layers, which can be removed. Wear cotton or linen, rather than synthetics or wool.
- Avoid high neck tops and wear open-neck shirts where possible.
- Take sips of cold water or iced drinks
- Keep rooms cool, using a fan to keep air moving. A hand-held battery- operated fan may help.
- Wear cotton pyjamas or nightshirt. Put a soft cotton towel on the bed that can be easily changed. If you have night sweats, nightclothes or towels are easier to change than the sheets.
- Use cotton bed sheets not synthetic.
- Take a cool or lukewarm shower before bed.
- The use of a cooling pillow insert, such as a 'Chillow® Pillow' may help reduce the number or severity of night-time hot flushes.

## Smoking

If you smoke, try to stop or smoke less. Help is available free of charge on the NHS. Please ask your nurse or doctor to refer you to the Smoking Cessation Programme, or see your GP or local pharmacist. You can also contact the Trust Stop Smoking Service:

Telephone: 0116 454 4000, or

National Quitline, Telephone: 0300 123 1044

## Herbal remedies

You may have read that certain herbal medicines may be beneficial in the treatment of hot flushes. However, there is very limited evidence on their effectiveness and safety. In addition, herbal medicines may interact with other medicines that you are taking, or may have side effects that make them unsuitable for you. If you are considering taking herbal medicines, please speak to your health professional or doctor before you start taking them.

## Other medication from your doctor

If you have tried the above measures and you are still affected by your hot flushes, you can discuss the suitability of drug therapy with your doctor, specialist nurse or health care professional.

Some medicines have been shown to reduce the occurrence and severity of flushes. However, the evidence that these work is limited and the medicines are not licensed for this use. All medicines have side effects and not all medicines are suitable for everyone. If your doctor is considering prescribing medicines for your hot flushes, the effect needs to be monitored during the treatment period by the doctor or specialist nurse.

**The following information can be shown to your doctor for information:**

**Medroxyprogesterone** (20 mg per day), initially for 10 weeks, to manage troublesome hot flushes caused by long-term hormone suppression.

**Cyproterone acetate** (50 mg twice a day for 4 weeks) to treat troublesome hot flushes if medroxyprogesterone is not effective or not tolerated.

Reference: NICE Guideline: NG131 Prostate Cancer Diagnosis and Management (Published 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

## Useful sources of information

### Prostate Cancer UK

Telephone: 0800 074 8383

Website:: [www.prostatecanceruk.org](http://www.prostatecanceruk.org)

### Macmillan Cancer Support

Telephone: 0808 808 0000

Website:: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

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