Treating hot flushes with non-hormonal medicines

Alternatives to menopausal hormone therapy

the women's
the royal women's hospital

This fact sheet provides general information about non-hormonal prescription medicines for hot flushes.

What is menopause?

Menopause is a normal life event. It happens when your ovaries stop releasing eggs. This causes changes in your hormones. If you're still having periods, they usually become irregular and then stop.

Menopause usually happens gradually. The time leading up to menopause is called perimenopause or menopause transition.

Perimenopause starts when you first notice changes in your menstrual cycle and lasts until a year after your last period. Menopausal symptoms can include hot flushes, night sweats and vaginal dryness.

If you're not having periods because you've had a hysterectomy or you're taking hormonal contraception, you may not notice you've entered perimenopause.

What are hot flushes?

A hot flush is a sudden feeling of warmth that often starts in your chest and spreads up to your neck and head. You might sweat, feel your heart race (palpitations), or feel anxious. When hot flushes happen at night (night sweats), they can disturb your sleep and affect your mood and concentration in the day.

Everyone's experience is different. Some people don't have hot flushes, some have brief or mild ones, and others have them for years.

Hot flushes are usually due to hormonal changes at perimenopause and menopause. Taking hormone blockers (for example, for breast cancer) can also cause hot flushes.

What are non-hormonal medicines?

Non-hormonal medicines do not contain hormones, unlike menopausal hormone therapy (MHT). Because of this, they can be a good option for people who should avoid hormonal treatments for menopausal symptoms.

You might choose non-hormonal medicines if you:

- can't take menopausal hormone therapy
- prefer not to use hormones.

Which non-hormonal medicines can reduce hot flushes?

Some medicines originally designed to treat other health conditions - like overactive bladder, depression, chronic pain or high blood pressure - can also help reduce hot flushes.

There is also a newer, non-hormonal medicine, fezolinetant, made specifically for moderate to severe hot flushes as an alternative to MHT.

These medicines include:

- oxybutynin - commonly used for overactive bladder
- fezolinetant - made specifically for hot flushes
- antidepressants - such as citalopram, escitalopram, venlafaxine
- gabapentin - sometimes used for chronic pain
- clonidine - used for high blood pressure.

You need a prescription from your doctor for these medicines.

Talk with your doctor about your symptoms and which options may be right for you.

Oxybutynin

This tablet is also known by the brand name Ditropan.

Oxybutynin is the most effective non-hormonal medicine for hot flushes.

Side effects include a dry mouth, constipation, drowsiness, dry eyes, blurred vision and decreased sweating.

Fezolinetant

Fezolinetant is marketed as Veoza.

Common side effects include headache, sleepiness and stomach or gut problems. There is a small risk of liver damage, so your doctor will monitor your liver function with blood tests while you're taking it.

Antidepressants

Several commonly used antidepressants - like citalopram, escitalopram and venlafaxine - can also reduce hot flushes and night sweats.

Possible side effects include nausea, dizziness, weight gain, problems having or enjoying sexual activity (sexual dysfunction), trouble sleeping (insomnia), dry mouth and headaches.

Gabapentin

This capsule, brand name Neurontin, comes in several different strengths. There is an identical generic version which is usually cheaper.

Side effects include drowsiness, light-headedness and dizziness.

Clonidine

This tablet is also known by the brand name Catapress. It comes in 2 different strengths. It may have a small effect on hot flushes.

Side effects include dry mouth, drowsiness, dizziness, fatigue, constipation and headache.

How to take non-hormonal medicines

These medicines come in different doses and forms, and you may need to take them at different times of the day, or with or without food. Because of this, it's important to follow the instructions for your specific medicine.

Always follow the instructions on the medicine packet and the advice your doctor or pharmacist gives you. They will explain:

- the right dose for you
- when to take the medicine
- how often to take it
- how to take it safely.

Don't change your dose or stop the medicine without talking with your doctor or pharmacist.

For more information about these medicines

For more information about your medicines — including how to take them safely, possible side effects and any interactions with other substances — read the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) or speak with your doctor or pharmacist. You'll find the CMI inside the medicine box, or you can ask your doctor or pharmacist for a copy.

You can also call the Women's Medicine Information Service on (03) 8345 3190, Monday to Friday between 9am and 4pm (except public holidays) or email drug.information@thewomens.org.au.

For more information about menopause

The Women's fact sheets

- Menopause
  thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#menopause
- Menopausal Hormone Therapy (MHT)
  thewomens.org.au/health-information/fact-sheets#menopausal-hormone-therapy

Menopause - Better Health Channel
betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/ConditionsAndTreatments/menopause

Menopause - Jean Hailes for Women's Health
jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/menopause

Menopause - NHS UK
nhs.uk/conditions/menopause

My Meno Plan
https://mymenoplan.org

Patient information - Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists UK
rcog.org.uk/for-the-public/browse-our-patient-information - search for menopause

Queer Menopause
queermenopause.com

Do you need an interpreter?

You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

Family Violence Support

1800 Respect National Helpline

You can get help if you have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.
You can call any time of day or night.
1800 737 732
1800respect.org.au

Shared decision making

The best decisions about your care happen when you and your healthcare team make them together. Your team should give you clear information, explain your options and listen to your questions and concerns.

Before your appointment, write down your questions and take them with you. To begin with, try these 3 questions:

- What are my options? (including wait and watch)
- What are the possible benefits and harms of those options?
- How likely are each of those benefits and harms to happen to me?

For more information, visit the Ask Share Know website.
https://askshareknow.org.au

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