

Managing hot flushes

A guide for men on hormone deprivation therapy for prostate cancer

What are hot flushes?

Hot flushes are the sensation of sudden waves of intense heat and a feeling that the face and whole body is flushing. They are often accompanied by sweating. Hot flushes can last for a few minutes or up to half an hour and can happen either occasionally, or regularly and frequently during the day and night.

They can be unpleasant and debilitating. Hot flushes can make your body feel intensely hot and can be overwhelming. You can become drenched in sweat. You may also experience chills as the sweat dries on the skin surface.

Why do I get hot flushes?

Hot flushes commonly occur in men undergoing hormone deprivation therapy for prostate cancer. Prostate cancer can be controlled or treated by lowering the amount of testosterone in your body. This is called hormone deprivation therapy (or androgen deprivation therapy) and can be achieved with an operation, injection or tablets. One of the side effects of low testosterone is hot flushes.

Can anything help my hot flushes?

Flushes can be triggered by certain foods or drinks, your environment or how you feel. The first step to managing your flushes is to find out what your triggers are. Keep a diary for a few days, noting what you eat and drink, and what you are doing when you experience a hot flush. If you can identify triggers, you may be able to take steps to avoid them, reduce them or minimise the effects.

Common triggers include:

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

Managing stress

Many people notice that stress can increase the frequency and severity of their hot flushes. There are various ways to reduce stress including relaxation, exercises, massage, meditation and acupuncture.

Managing your environment

- Dress in layers, so you can take clothes off as you get warmer. Wear cotton, linen or rayon, rather than synthetic fabrics or wool.
- Avoid polo neck tops and wear open-neck shirts where possible.
- Carry a bottle of cold water to sip.
- Keep your home cool. Turn down the heating or use a fan. You may also find it helpful to carry a hand held battery operated fan when you go out. Even cheap paper fans can help.
- Wear cotton pyjamas or a nightshirt. If you perspire a lot at night, your nightclothes are easier to change than the sheets.
- Use cotton sheets only, not synthetics.
- Take a cool shower before bed.
- The use of a cooling pillow insert, such as a “Chillow Pillow” may help reduce the incidence or severity of night-time hot flushes.

Food and drink

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

Smoking

If you smoke, try to stop. Help is available to everyone 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 on **020 7188 0995** or the National Quitline on **0800 169 0169**.

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 also their 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 nurse or doctor before you start taking them. Alternatively, you can call the pharmacy medicines helpline for further information (contact details on page 3).

Other medication from your doctor

Some medicines have been shown to reduce the occurrence and severity of flushes, although the evidence is limited and none are licensed for this use. 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 or specialist nurse. All medicines have side effects and not all medicines are suitable for everyone.

Useful sources of information

Prostate Cancer UK

t: 0800 074 8383

w: www.prostatecanceruk.org

Macmillan Cancer Support

t: 0808 808 00 00

w: www.macmillan.org



Dimbleby Cancer Care provides cancer support services for Guy's and St Thomas'. We have a drop-in information area staffed by specialist nurses and offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice for patients and carers.

Dimbleby Cancer Care is located in the Welcome Village of the Cancer Centre at Guy's. **t:** 020 7188 5918 **e:** DimblebyCancerCare@gstt.nhs.uk

Complementary therapies such as aromatherapy and reflexology can be organised for inpatients or outpatients, and there are regular relaxation and stress management courses. These services are free of charge for cancer patients and their carers.

Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals offer a range of cancer-related information leaflets for patients and carers, available at www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/cancer-leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the clinical nurse specialist or other member of staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

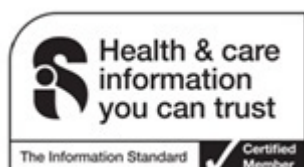
w: www.nhs.uk

Leaflet number: 2843/VER4

Date published: September 2016

Review date: January 2019

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