

## 20. Hot Flashes

Hot flashes are described as a sudden unpleasant sensation of burning heat across the face, neck and/or chest. They can cause reddening of the skin and sometimes drenching sweats. Their frequency can vary from one or two per week, to ten or more in one day. They can be a side effect of some cancer treatments such as those for breast cancer or prostate cancer and are particularly associated with hormone treatments. Generally the frequency of hot flashes will decrease over time. Hot flashes are the most commonly reported menopausal symptom triggered by low oestrogen levels, but they remain poorly understood. They can be so severe, however, as to cause intense night sweats that interfere with sleep and necessitate a change in bed linen.

### How can I manage my hot flashes?

- If your hot flashes feel more like a fever then read the section on *High temperatures or fever* elsewhere in this directory. **If you feel unwell and have a fever it is essential that you see your GP or Nurse for advice as soon as possible.**
- Treatment such as Hormone Replacement Therapy is available for hot flashes caused by hormone changes though of course this needs to be discussed with your Oncology Doctor.
- Changes to diet can also help with symptoms (e.g. some people find drinking caffeinated drinks like tea and coffee, or alcohol make the symptoms worse).
- Other lifestyle changes such as drinking more water, taking more exercise, quitting smoking and reducing consumption of certain foods and drinks that bring on a hot flush (e.g. spicy foods) can also reduce the likelihood that medication is needed.
- Wearing clothes such as cotton can help with symptoms as well as wearing several layers so that one could be taken off as necessary.
- Relaxation techniques can be extremely helpful in reducing the effects of a hot flush. Slow breathing and mental distraction techniques may also be useful.
- There are many complementary therapies used to treat hot flashes such as; black cohosh, evening primrose, sage tea or soy derivatives. **However, *always check with your doctor before taking any preparations because some can make the situation worse and can interfere with the effect of some chemotherapy drugs***
- Some people find that therapies like acupuncture or reflexology help.
- If the hot flashes are caused by medications, they will stop when the medication is stopped.
- Discuss your symptoms with your doctor who may be able to offer a prescription for you should this be appropriate. There has been some reported evidence that the antidepressant Venlafaxine may be beneficial for some people.

## Local Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<b>Mustard Tree Cancer Support &amp; Triangle Drop In Centres</b> Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers	<b>Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital:</b> Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 <b>Kingsbridge:</b> Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 <b>Liskeard:</b> Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 <b>Tavistock:</b> Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935
<b>Other Resources</b>	Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist Nurse or District Nurse.

## National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<b>Cancer Research UK</b>	<a href="http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-help/coping-with-cancer/coping-physically/sex-hormone-symptoms-and-cancer/coping-with-sex-hormone-symptoms/hot-flushes-sweats">http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cancer-help/coping-with-cancer/coping-physically/sex-hormone-symptoms-and-cancer/coping-with-sex-hormone-symptoms/hot-flushes-sweats</a>
<b>Prostate Cancer UK</b> Provides information on side effects of treatment including hot flushes	<a href="http://www.prostatecanceruk.org">www.prostatecanceruk.org</a>
<b>Macmillan Cancer Support</b> Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.	www.macmillan.org.uk <b>0808 808 0000</b> (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)

## Further Information:

<b>Macmillan booklets:</b> – Available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre
Cancer and complementary therapies
Controlling the symptoms of cancer
How are you feeling?
Understanding chemotherapy
Understanding radiotherapy