HOT FLASHES

Pre- and post-menopausal women, as well as men being treated for prostate cancer may suddenly find themselves dealing with unexpected hot flashes due to their cancer treatment. Hormone replacement therapy is not an option for many patients, and it should never be taken without a thorough review by your oncologist. Medications, other than estrogen, are available for severe situations. Be reassured that in time, hot flashes will disappear.

Moderate Symptoms: 1-15 minutes

- Mild warmth, perspiration, clammy skin, dry mouth, increased heart rate
- Irritability, tiredness, agitation

Severe Symptoms: 1-45 minutes

- Burning up
- Rolling perspiration
- Difficulty breathing, headache, nausea, cramps
- Sleep disturbance

Tips for Dealing with Hot Flashes

- Keep a small bag of ice handy. Just picking it up when a flash begins can often diminish the intensity.
- Drink something icy cold when you feel a hot flash coming.
- Avoid going from a hot to cold environment. This may trigger a hot flash.
- Rely on personal-size fans and misters for quick cooling.
- Foods that trigger flashes vary from person to person. Spicy foods, hot coffee or tea, and alcohol seem particularly troublesome.
- Take a cool shower before going to bed.
- Wear 100% cotton nightwear and sleep on cotton sheets.
- Wear loose fitting clothing of natural fibers.
- Use lightweight blankets at night.
- Dress in layers.
- Avoid turtlenecks.
- With your physician's permission, add soy products to your diet. (Supermarkets and health food stores have a lot of tasty offerings now.)
- Avoid sugar. Many patients believe there is a direct correlation with sugar intake and full-blown flashes.
- Limit intake of red wine, aged cheese and chocolate.
- Avoid smoking.
- Exercise daily as you are able.
- Stress seems to make flashes worse. Avoid it if at all possible.
- Maintain your sense of humor.

Relaxation techniques such as meditative breathing may ease the severity of hot flashes.