



# Psychoeducation helpful for Menopause

*Understanding what is happening in your body can reduce fear and help restore a sense of control. For many people, however, hot flushes and night sweats are closely linked with stress, anxiety, self-criticism, or past experiences, which can feel difficult to manage alone.*

*If you would like support in exploring the emotional and psychological impact of menopause, I offer a compassionate, person-centred space to help you make sense of your experience and develop coping strategies that feel right for you. You're very welcome to get in touch to arrange an initial conversation.*

## Hot Flushes / Night Sweats

Hot flushes occur due to changes in the thermo-neutral zone, which is the body's comfortable temperature range where it doesn't need to shiver or sweat to regulate heat.

During menopause, oestrogen levels drop, which affects the hypothalamus—the part of the brain responsible for temperature regulation. This narrows the thermo-neutral zone, meaning even slight changes in body temperature can trigger an exaggerated response.

If the body slightly overheats, instead of a mild adjustment, it reacts aggressively—blood vessels dilate, causing a sudden rush of heat, sweating, and flushing.

If the body cools down too much, it may trigger shivering or chills.

This explains why menopausal individuals often experience hot flushes followed by sudden cold sensations—their body is struggling to regulate temperature within a much smaller comfort range.

Watch this video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsCxeK8CIU&t=2s>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0378512211000326>



## Stress & Lifestyle

Managing stress and lifestyle are vital aspects of managing menopause symptoms.

### Helpful strategies:

- Prioritise your health and well-being.
- Keep a healthy balance between rest and activity by having some exercise every day if you can and by pacing activities throughout the day.
- Identify anything that is stressful or worrying and allocate a specific time to think about it and for problem solving. It can help to write this down.
- Engage in at least one pleasant activity every day.

### Less helpful strategies:

- Being terribly busy so that you are exhausted and then sleep in the daytime.
- Keeping problems to yourself and having worries at the back of your mind most of the time so that you think about them in the middle of the night.
- Not making time for yourself e.g. for exercise, relaxation, or pleasant activities.
- Avoiding people or activities.

### Tackling stressful thinking

Situation that makes me stressed:

How stressed or worried do I feel out of 100?

100 = worst ever, and 0 = not at all E.g. Anxious 75%- incredibly stressed!

What do I worry is going to happen? Often our worries predict the worst-case scenario, and we believe that this is highly likely to happen.

### Tackling anxious thinking

Is this style of thinking helping me to cope in this situation?

Yes? How?

No? Why not? -

If the thoughts are not helpful, what would be a more helpful way to think about the situation?



**To help you think about a more helpful way to approach the situation, think about the following two questions:**

1. Would a friend agree wholeheartedly (100%) with this worried thought?
  2. What may he/ she say that would help me to approach the situation calm?
- Conversely, if a friend had this worry, would you agree and tell her everything will go wrong, and she won't be able to cope? If not, what would you say to your friend to support her and help her cope with the situation?
  - If thoughts are self-critical, highlight the differences between your responses to yourself versus others.
  - Are there times in the past when you can see that this thought was not true? (e.g. when you did cope?)
  - If the thought is about what others are thinking, what evidence you have that they think this way? Might they be thinking something else? Can you mind read?
  - What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking this way?

Now, write down your calmer more helpful thought? Has your level of worry / anxiety reduced?

(Smith Balabanovich Hunter BMS, 2025)

## Managing Hot Flashes

### Behavioural Strategies

- Practice relaxation every day, continue stress reducing goals and pace activities to avoid rushing.
- At the onset of a flush let your shoulders relax, breathe slowly from your stomach, and concentrate on your breathing - let the flush flow over you as you relax.
- Check your thoughts - substitute calming thoughts instead of negative or catastrophising thoughts.

### RELAX → SLOW BREATHING → CALMING THOUGHTS

- Cool down with sips of water, wearing layers, carrying a fan.
- But try **not** to rush out of social situations or avoid situations or doing things that you would usually enjoy.
- Use relaxation and your relaxing image to reduce stress on a regular basis.



### **Main types of worries around hot flushes and night sweats are:**

- Social embarrassment (especially around men or at work).
- Lack of control.
- Worries about disrupted sleep.

### **Compared with women who reported low levels of distress around hot flushes, women with the highest levels of distress:**

- Tend to catastrophise about the hot flush e.g. This is out of control.
- Use shaming self-labels about their appearance (e.g. dirty, smelly, unattractive) ignoring all other positive characteristics and qualities they may have.
- Are more self-critical within the situation E.g. I look awful, why can't I cope with these?
- Report more physical sensation (indicating that their attention is focused only on flush - which will make the sensations more powerful).

### **Social Situations**

Embarrassment and Shame arise from perceptions of what other may be thinking.

- Assumptions that others will be making negative judgements about you.
- These assumptions can arise from your own negative views of self and menopause.
- When you assume what others are thinking, you switch your attention from focusing outwards into the situation and instead focus it all in on yourself - this increases self-consciousness and can make the flush more intense.
- This also increases the tendency to judge your entire character on one aspect of the situation (i.e. the flush) rather than external factors (e.g. the other person may not have noticed or may have their own stresses that they are worrying about) or positive information about yourself.

### **Feeling out of Control**

This involves a catastrophic interpretation of symptoms - worst outcome and focuses on feeling unable to cope.

"Not another one!"



"I can't cope."

"This will never end."

"I will pass out / collapse / lose control."

Common thinking errors are catastrophising (these will never end!), 'should's' and 'should not's' (I should be able to cope), and over generalisation (I can't cope). This type of thinking ignores the flushes you do cope with, ignores the times when hot flushes have not interfered with your life, and makes you feel even worse. This can result in anger, feeling overwhelmed, anxiety, frustration, hopelessness.

Instead:

- Aim to develop higher tolerance of frustration caused by hot flush - You have a choice of how to respond rather than being a victim of hot flush / anger. So rather than saying- I can't cope! These will never end!
- Alternatives are "I can cope using paced breathing / let's see how well I can cope with this one" as well as "This will pass soon / my hot flushes will reduce over time".

## Breaking the Cycle of Worry

Sometimes the thoughts we have especially at night can be upsetting and cause us to become restless and agitated, the opposite of feeling relaxed. It is not surprising they keep us awake. We need to be in a state of relaxation in order for us to fall asleep.

So, manage the thoughts before they lead to worry, don't engage with them..... how?

- Allow thoughts to come and go, e.g. like a train passing through a station - just watch them passing by.
- Think about a pleasant, relaxing image and/ or use paced breathing and relaxation.
- Think of something that will take your attention, e.g. recall the story line from a book you have recently read .... but nothing too detailed or complex as that will make you more alert.

If the thought does take hold this might be because the thought is associated with fears

- Be firm in telling yourself that you will assign yourself a set 'worry time' or problem-solving time the next day (daytime) to use specifically for thinking about the problem that concerns you.
- Recognise the thought but let it flow over you, telling yourself that you will deal with the issue in 'worry time' the next day.
- Return to relaxation, paced breathing and pleasant imagery.

Our beliefs and attitudes do affect our sleep and how we feel the next day.



### **What helps?**

- Try not to worry about sleep – your body will make up for lost sleep in time.
- Have realistic expectations - everyone, and especially those experiencing night sweats, will have a poor night's sleep occasionally.
- Recognising that not feeling completely rested some days is normal when you wake up EVEN AFTER a good night's sleep!
- Recognise too that there are some things within your control:
  - keeping your sleep schedule as regular as you are able.
  - cutting out negative lifestyle influences from your life and your bedroom area.
  - not napping in the daytime.
  - not spending too much time in bed

### **Don't:**

- Exaggerate the seriousness of broken sleep as this can lead to more worry e.g. "I look 10 years older after no sleep last night" or "I woke last night so I'll feel terrible all day".
- Let your world revolve around sleep.
- Cancel activities as that gives you more time to worry about the upcoming night.

### **Do:**

- Get on with normal life and activities even if you have had a bad night's sleep - distracting activities can be relaxing, make you feel better and sleeping habits.
- Recognise that sleep problems are not dangerous.

### *Disclaimer:*

*This information is provided for supportive and educational purposes and does not replace medical advice or treatment. If you are in crisis or feel unsafe, please contact the Samaritans on 116 123 or access urgent support via your GP or call 999.*