

# Don't Sweat It

By Suze Hargraves

I always wanted to think of myself as “hot”. On my 35<sup>th</sup> birthday I got my wish. I was hot. I was so hot, so suddenly, that my winter wardrobe went into permanent storage. Unfortunately for me, it had nothing to do with looks. I was having hot flashes. I could boil water simply by sticking my finger in a pot. I wanted to think I was experiencing power surges, but in reality it was just plain old excessive sweating.

Excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis) comes in two forms. The first is focal hyperhidrosis which causes sweaty palms, feet and underarms. The second is generalized hyperhidrosis. This is the one that gets you during menopause. According to Mayo Clinic, three out of four women will experience hot flashes during menopause. The theory most commonly accepted is that estrogen reduction disrupts the part of the brain that regulates body temperature called the “hypothalamus”. The key to this theory is the gradual reduction of estrogen which occurs in menopause. There are, however, other reasons for generalized hyperhidrosis to occur.

What you eat can also trigger generalized hyperhidrosis. Dee Anna Glaser, MD, professor of dermatology at St. Louis University School of Medicine and president of the International Hyperhidrosis Society reports, “Hot coffee, hot tea, and hot soups can sometimes make people sweat, even though their whole core body temperature isn't hot.” Another culinary culprit is spicy-hot foods. Hot spices and sauces, trick your body into thinking you're hot. Your body begins to sweat which is how your body protects you from overheating.

Excessive sweating can also be associated with some very serious health conditions like thyroid problems, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), leukemia, lymphoma, heart attack and infection. Medication can also trigger a bout of the sweats. Check with your healthcare provider or pharmacist to find out if excessive sweating could be a side effect of a medication you take. Many mental health conditions such as anxiety also list excessive sweating among their symptoms.

No matter what is causing your “hot flashes” there are steps you can take to reduce their severity. Don't smoke. Maintain a healthy weight. Avoid hot beverages and alcohol. Avoid spicy foods. Dress to be comfortable where you will be spending most of your time, not according to the thermometer outside. Just because it's 30 degrees outside doesn't mean a sweater is a good choice for spending the day in house that's kept at 78 degrees. Drink cold liquids as often as possible. Keep stress at bay with meditation, regular exercise and positive affirmations.

If you're sweating and feeling dizzy, in pain, nauseous, are showing signs of infection or are light headed don't second guess yourself. Get to the nearest emergency care facility. You're body is set up to alert you to a problem. Listen.

There is help available for dealing with “hot flashes” or general hyperhidrosis. Don't be afraid to bring the subject up during a medical appointment. A simple medication change or a lifestyle change could alleviate your symptoms. Remember, you're healthcare team can't help you if you don't talk to them.

Relief is available for any type of excessive sweating. Don't sweat it.

Suze Hargraves is a staff member and writer for White Mountain Community Health Center, a non-profit health care provider serving the Mount Washington Valley online at [www.whitemountainhealth.org](http://www.whitemountainhealth.org) or call (603) 447-8900, Ext. 1, for an appointment or information.

