



Night Sweats. What If It's Not Menopause?

Hot flashes and night sweats, also called vasomotor symptoms (VMS), can significantly affect daily function and quality of life at home and work. Night sweats can be particularly distressing because they often cause sleep disruption and personal discomfort from soaked bedclothes and sheets. Vasomotor symptoms happen with menopause because estrogen levels drop, which affects the part of the brain that controls body temperature. Changes in temperature (even small changes) can make the body feel like it is overheating, resulting in widening of the blood vessels to release heat and causing a sudden feeling of warmth, flushing, and sweating. Although VMS commonly occur during menopause, they often improve over time and for most people will go away within a few years.

However, all VMS, particularly night sweats, aren't always caused by menopause. When night sweats occur in someone who is still having a regular menstrual cycle, or in someone who experiences night sweats several years after discontinuing hormone therapy, or if night sweats return after they'd gone away, menopause is unlikely to be the cause.

If it's not menopause, what's causing night sweats?

There are several medical conditions, drugs, and even lifestyle choices that can cause night sweats. Reasons can include sleep problems like sleep apnea, being overweight, acid reflux, an overactive thyroid, or mood problems including anxiety and depression.

Many medicines can also make you sweat at night. Antidepressants are some of the most common, but others such as pain relievers, steroids, heart medicines, and even some medicines for dry mouth may make you sweat more.

It is important to investigate the underlying cause because some of the causes may be life-threatening. Certain infections including HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, or serious infections in the heart or body can cause night sweats. In addition, problems with hormones, like overactive thyroid or diabetes can also contribute. Some cancers, especially ones that affect the blood (ie, leukemia and lymphoma), can cause night sweats.

| Nonmenopause Causes of Night Sweats | |
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| Medical conditions | Obstructive sleep apnea, obesity, gastroesophageal reflux disease, hyperthyroidism, mood disorders, diabetes, carcinoid syndrome, pheochromocytoma, sarcoidosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and granulosa disease |
| Cancers | Leukemia, lymphoma, prostate, renal cell, and medullary carcinoma of the thyroid |
| Infections | HIV, tuberculosis, endocarditis, vector borne infections, mononucleosis, and acute respiratory viruses |
| Medications | Antidepressants, anxiolytics, over-the-counter fever and pain relievers, corticosteroids, thyroid hormones, hypoglycemic-inducing medications, beta-blockers, angiotensin II receptor blockers, calcium channel blockers, nitroglycerin, and medicines for glaucoma and dry mouth |
| Lifestyle factors | Tobacco use, alcohol consumption, and opioid and narcotic withdrawal |

What should you do if you have night sweats?

First, think about your room. Is it too hot or are you using too many blankets? If you've checked that and you're still having night sweats, pay attention to any other symptoms, such as weight loss, fever, or swollen glands. These symptoms require medical evaluation. If you're taking a medication and suddenly start sweating at night, ask your healthcare professional if that could be the cause.

Usually, your healthcare professional will ask about your symptoms and do a checkup. They might order blood tests or a chest x-ray, and if you have trouble breathing at night, they might check for sleep apnea. Sometimes, more tests are needed to look for infection or cancer, but most of the time, night sweats are not caused by something dangerous.

How are night sweats treated?

Treating night sweats depends on the cause. If medication is the reason, stopping it may help. If it's because of sleep apnea or a thyroid problem, treating that issue can help. If you don't know the cause, there are some treatments for sweating, but they don't always work well. For most people, if the sweats don't bother you too much and your healthcare professional says there's nothing serious going on, you might not need any treatment at all.

Resources: Please visit The Menopause Society's website (menopause.org) where you can find additional information on important menopause-related topics, including hot flashes, midlife weight gain, sleep dysfunction, mood changes, and hormone therapy. You can also search for a menopause-certified specialist in your area.



This *MenoNote* provides current general information but not specific medical advice. It is not intended to substitute for the judgment of a person's healthcare professional. Additional information can be found at www.menopause.org. The Menopause Society is committed to leading the conversation about improving women's health and healthcare experiences during the menopause transition and beyond. The Society develops evidence-based position statements and consensus recommendations to ensure that healthcare professionals and the public have access to the most up-to-date information.

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