

BREAST CANCER

Minding your hot flashes

A great proportion (65–85%) of women receiving treatment for breast cancer suffer from hot flashes and night sweats (HFNS), which can severely affect their quality of life. Myra Hunter and colleagues have now shown an effective way to make these symptoms manageable.

In the MENOS1 randomized trial, 96 women were allocated to receive either cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) or usual care. For 6 weeks, women in the CBT group had 1.5 h of weekly group sessions that focused on strategies for pace breathing, reducing stress and anxiety associated with episodes of hot flashes, and improving sleep habits. Women in the usual care group received information and nurse support. “The primary outcome of the MENOS1 study was problem-rating of hot flashes, as well as frequency, because problem-rating is more closely linked to help-seeking and quality of life,” explains Hunter. They also evaluated mood, quality of sleep, social functioning and a physiological measure of hot flashes to estimate to what extent

the treatment was effective. Although there was no difference in the frequency of HFNS between the two groups, women in the CBT group were reported to sleep better, be less depressed and, in general, felt healthier than those in usual care. These improvements were sustained up to 26 weeks after treatment.

CBT represents a safe, effective and inexpensive way to manage HFNS, which, according to the researchers, should be implemented in cancer survivorship programs, “we are writing a self-help book based on the treatment, and plan to train health professionals, such as clinical nurse specialists and counsellors, to run group CBT in oncology settings,” concludes Hunter.

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Original article Mann, E. *et al.* Cognitive behavioural treatment for women who have menopausal symptoms after breast cancer treatment (MENOS 1): a randomised controlled trial. *Lancet Oncol.* doi:10.1016/S1470-2045(11)70364-3