

# Yoga, acupuncture might ease menopause hot flashes

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Acupuncture and yoga could offer relief from the hot flashes of menopause, a new analysis suggests.

During hot flashes, women suddenly feel uncomfortably warm, become flushed and begin sweating. Hot flashes can be treated with hormone therapies, but these have been linked to increased risks of heart attacks, strokes, blood clots, breast cancer and other problems, prompting many women to seek non-drug alternatives.

“I have been doing research in menopause for 30 years. I had heard from many women that they are bothered by hot flashes and do not wish to take hormone therapy,” Nancy Avis, from the Wake Forest School of Medicine in North Carolina, told Reuters Health in an e-mail.

Avis and colleagues looked closely at three studies of non-drug treatment options for hot flashes and pooled the results, reporting their findings in the journal *Menopause*. All of the women had been experiencing at least four hot flashes a day.

The researchers found that hot flashes became less frequent over about eight weeks in women who tried acupuncture, attended yoga sessions or took health and wellness education classes.

Overall, they found, any intervention that drew the women's attention was more effective than doing nothing at all.

The first study, for example, divided participants into three groups. One group received regular acupuncture, a second received fake acupuncture treatments, and a third did not receive any treatment at all. Women in this study showed a 40 per cent reduction in the number of hot flashes they experienced, whether they were given actual or sham acupuncture treatment — but not if they received no intervention.

In the second study, women either practiced yoga regularly, attended health and wellness classes, or did not take part in either activity. Women in the yoga group showed a 66 per cent reduction in hot flashes while those in the wellness group showed a 63 per cent reduction.

In the third study, half of the women received acupuncture treatments. At eight weeks, the acupuncture group showed a 33.9 per cent reduction in the frequency of symptoms like hot flashes, while the group that did not get acupuncture treatments showed a mere 3.3 per cent reduction.

Understanding the physiological effects of stress management and yoga and how they impact the cardiovascular, endocrine and nervous systems is useful, Dr Patricia Davidson, of the International Council on Women's Health Issues, said in an e-mail.

“Establishing positive health seeking behaviours is critical at this time of life when the risks for chronic conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke, increase,” added Dr Davidson, who was not involved in the studies.

“The results are not surprising to me,” Dr Monica Christmas, Director of the Menopause Programme at the University of Chicago, told Reuters Health in an e-mail.

Dr Christmas, who was not involved in any of the studies, added, “I'm in my late 40's and have been an avid yogi for over 20 years. If there was ever a fountain of youth, I believe it is yoga. The studies show the benefit of doing something active that relieves stress and overall feels good.”

One problem, Dr Christmas pointed out, is that acupuncture and yoga can be expensive and might not be affordable or accessible to a large number of women.

The problem of hot flashes is widespread, she noted. “[About] 80 per cent of women experience vasomotor symptoms of varying degrees, which I see in my menopause clinics,” she said. “I base treatment on patient preferences, medical history and severity of

symptoms. I often discuss lifestyle modifications and non-prescription treatment modalities as first-line care. [For] women with severe symptoms resulting in significant quality of life issues, I discuss prescription options.”

Dr Davidson agrees.

“Interventions need to be tailored... balancing risks and benefits,” she said.

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