



## Report from a Hot Flush Queen

by author Leslie Grant Timmins

If you're a Hot Flush Queen like me, stress reduction and bio-identical hormone therapy may bring relief from menopausal symptoms, as I reported in the September issue of *alive*.

But certain conditions may bring your hot flushes, insomnia, and night sweats back, and your doctor may not be able to tell you why or what to do about it. Alternative or complementary therapies that offer an individualized approach to treatment can provide answers and relief.

### A Unique Pattern of Imbalance

"There is no protocol for treating menopause in Chinese medicine," says Lorne Brown, a registered traditional Chinese medicine practitioner and acupuncturist. "I assess each woman as a unique individual. If three women come to me with hot flushes, insomnia, and anxiety, but have 20 other symptoms entirely different from

each other, why would I treat them the same?"

"But if there's no protocol," I ask him, "how do you decide on treatment?"

"We gather information from the patient about her diet, digestive system, menstrual history, emotional life, the timing of hot flushes, internal and external stress, sleep patterns, and whether she has unfulfilled desires. We're looking for a pattern of imbalance. Within this pattern is a collection of signs and symptoms that go together, according to Chinese medicine, but may seem totally unrelated in western medicine. We don't treat symptoms; we treat the underlying cause. Treatment addresses many things simultaneously. It's a restorative approach."

I've noticed three things that consistently make my hot flushes return or worsen: sweet foods, a virus, or a difficult emotional event. I ask Lorne if he can explain why.

"From a Chinese medicine perspective," he says, "sweets, viruses, and stress all create heat, especially the stress. Stress is a perceived threat, so how you internalize it is part of the emotional component I'd look at. And different foods have different energetic principles. Alcohol, for example, forms a 'fire' in the body. Night sweats are also a form of fire."

### Acupuncture and Chinese Herbs

I've known women who've found acupuncture alone effective for hot flushes; I ask Lorne about this. His response surprises me. "I prefer not to use acupuncture without Chinese herbs to treat menopausal symptoms," he says. "I always use acupuncture to de-stress, smooth the flow of qi or life force, and provide short-term relief, but it's not as cost effective in the long term as using herbs. I may combine acupuncture with the herbs for the first month to provide short-term relief while the herbs take effect."

While western medicine focuses on the body's anatomical structure and physiology, Chinese medicine focuses on energetic levels in the body. Every organ has a meridian, and this meridian is not restricted to the site of the organ but runs from the toes to the top of the head. "For menopause symptoms," Lorne explains, "we always look at the kidney, liver, and spleen meridians and organ systems. There are specific, empirical acupuncture points for hot flushes and night sweats, but I also choose others based on the individual's pattern of imbalance."



Is there one specific herb for hot flushes? “No, that would be using Chinese herb without Chinese medical principles,” he says. “Usually we give herbs in a balanced combination based on the individual’s pattern, usually 4 to 12 herbs in a formula. The dosages and duration are different for each individual. This herbal formula is always changing as your pattern changes through treatment.”

The aim of the treatment is to smooth the transition and relieve the symptoms, not to stop menopause. Some women’s hot flushes may not be eliminated but may drop from eight a day to two. “Some patterns of imbalance are complicated and take time to correct,” says Lorne.

### **The Body/Mind Connection**

Dr. Luis Flores trained as a classical homeopathic doctor in Mexico prior to obtaining a medical degree there, and he now practices in Canada as a homeopath. In one regard, however, he and Lorne Brown sound remarkably alike. “The basis of homeopathy is individualization,” says Dr. Flores. “It tailors treatment to the patient.”

Although homeopathic remedies have not worked for me every time to relieve hot flushes, they have worked more often than not—even when I was firmly convinced they wouldn’t. I was eager to find a homeopath who would talk to me about menopause and about Vegatesting (see box), a diagnostic tool that has been about 80 percent accurate in identifying the causes of my own symptom fluctuations and the best remedies to treat them.

When I visit Dr. Flores’ calm, earth-toned offices in Vancouver, he is a little reluctant to discuss Vegatesting. “I use it only about 20 percent of the time, to confirm my clinical diagnosis and the homeopathic remedies I’ve chosen,” he says. “It’s like any diagnostic tool that a medical doctor uses—it should be used to confirm clinical suspicion, after you take a clinical history. But a lot of people are using Vegatesting like a gimmick. To use it properly you need to know pathophysiology; you need to be trained in how the body works, not just how the machine works.”

“How would you develop a ‘clinical suspicion’ for me if I came to you complaining of hot flushes, night sweats, and insomnia?” I ask him.

“Like any serious homeopath, I spend at least an hour with each patient. I take a meticulous clinical history, asking many questions, and observing body language and how the person speaks. I find out what other symptoms there are. I prefer to use a homeopathic remedy that fits the whole personality of my patient, and don’t base my prescription only on one symptom.”

Dr. Flores describes two patients, both of whom have hot flushes. One woman is very extroverted and doesn’t like anything tight-fitting around her neck or belly. The other woman is very thin and has pigmentation on top of her nose and around her eyes and she has a despondent disposition. “There is a different remedy for each of them,” he says. “A good homeopathic treatment should have the objective of treating the patient in her totality, physically and emotionally.”

Homeopathic doctors use a reference book called *Materia Medica* that describes symptoms, including emotions and personality characteristics, and prescribes specific remedies. “You fit the detailed picture the woman has given you to the remedy,” says Dr. Flores. “If you give the right remedy at the right potency, it will produce improvement.”

Homeopathic remedies are derived and diluted from substances that would cause the same symptoms you’re seeking relief from if they were ingested in larger amounts. One approach would be to use a homeopathic remedy that produces a strong action on an energetic level to reproduce hot flushes. This stimulates your body to correct the response.

### **Flush Out Toxins**

Both Lorne Brown and Dr. Flores point out that we live in a toxic world. Nonorganic foods, for example, are laced with pesticides. Dr. Flores says about 90 percent of his patients carry a heavy load of toxins in their bodies. “Diet is often poor and most of us don’t drink enough water,” he says. “When we eat large dinners in the evening, the organs charged with cleaning our bodies are overburdened and on overdrive all night.”

What’s the connection between toxicity and menopause symptoms? A woman’s liver produces lipoproteins that transport



hormones through the bloodstream to reach target organs; when hormone levels drop, as in perimenopause, the concentration of hormones reaching the target organs is reduced. An overburdened liver exacerbates this reduction, says Dr. Flores, and may explain the severe symptoms of menopause that some women experience. "When patients are detoxified," he notes, "the hot flushes often diminish in intensity and frequency or are relieved entirely."

"We don't have the technology yet to understand exactly how homeopathy works," Dr. Flores says, "but the most important thing for all of us is, after 200 years of it being used to treat both people and animals, we know it's safe and effective and produces no side effects."

Perimenopause and menopause are unique to each woman. There are effective treatments that reflect this reality, but persistence and open-mindedness may be needed to find the ones that are exactly right for you.

### **Vegatesting**

A Vegatest is an electrodermal diagnostic device that applied scientific technology to acupuncture theory. The device measures changes in skin resistance in response to test substances, such as homeopathic remedies, medications, foods, and chemicals, when brought into the patient's own "circuit" of energy. It's used to identify disorders, allergies, and sensitivities rather than disease.

Source: "Electrodermal Testing," Dr. Luis Flores.

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