

Night sweats or hot flashes - What to do they indicate?

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- Dr. Pavithra R -

Sweating is a common body mechanism through which the body regulates its temperature. It is common for us to sweat during hot weather, after finishing workout or yoga or after any other physical exertion. Also, it is common to sweat when you have using many blankets or after spicy meal. These are completely normal. But waking up at night with excessive sweating needs attention.

What exactly is a night sweat?

Night sweats are episodes of excessive sweating that happens during sleep. The sweating is so profuse that one needs to change clothes or sheets. That's the reason why night sweats are often described as soaking or drenching. Night sweats make a person very uncomfortable and affect the sleep cycle.

How does night sweats differ from hot flashes?

Unlike night sweats, hot flashes can occur anytime during the day. Hot flashes are a sudden feeling of heat in the body. When hot flashes occur during the night accompanied by profuse sweating they are called night sweats.

What are the causes of night sweats?

Our body's temperature regulation is based on multiple factors, making it hard in some cases to know the exact reason for night sweats. But there are few common causes which can trigger night sweats and hot

flashes.

A few common causes of night sweats are :

1. Menopause: It is a stage where women complete her menstrual cycle. At this stage, there are significant changes in the hormone - estrogen and progesterone production. This significant change is considered as one of the important factors for hot flashes. In many women, hot flashes can begin during this period of transition ie before menopause known as perimenopause and also can continue over to post-menopause.

2. Medications: Certain medications can also trigger night sweats. Antidepressants, steroids and certain drugs taken to reduce fever can cause excessive sweating.

3. Hormonal changes: Endocrine system controls the hormone levels in the body. Changes in the endocrine system like thyroid, diabetes, abnormal levels of sexual hormones can cause excessive sweating.

4. Infections: There are many infections that are associated with excessive sweating. The infection basically ends up in a fever or over-heating the body. Bacterial and fungal infections, tuberculosis and HIV are some of the infections where night sweats are a common symptom.

Simple lifestyle modifications to reduce the severity of night sweats:

- Prefer loose fitting and lightweight clothes. Remember, tight-fitting clothes trap the heat inside. Choose materials which are light, airy and breathable.
- Limit or avoid the intake of caffeine, alcohol and spicy foods. These often alter the body temperature and lead to sweating. By staying away from these during the night, one can limit night sweats.
- Drink cold water before going to bed
- Maintain ideal body weight
- Breathing and other relaxation techniques can help ease the symptoms of hot flashes among women.

Meeting a doctor is important as they can suggest tests and get to the root cause of the situation and treat it accordingly.

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