



# Herbal and Dietary Supplements for Hot Flashes

## Considering Herbs or Supplements for Hot Flashes

Are you using or considering any of these commonly used herbs and dietary supplements for hot flashes? (Check yes or no for each item, and note questions or concerns for your health care provider):

	Yes	No	Notes
• Black cohosh			
• Soy products			
• Dong quai			
• Vitamin E			
• Other herbs or supplements not listed here			

If you checked “yes” to any of the above items, let your health care provider know that you are taking them, how often and in what amounts. There are a variety of “natural” remedies available to relieve hot flashes. Most research studies conducted on herbs or dietary supplements for hot flashes to date have been observational studies. Researchers agree that more rigorous scientific testing of these compounds is needed before the exact benefits and potential harms can truly be known. The most common herbs and supplements for hot flashes include:

- Black cohosh — one of the most studied and popular herbs taken to relieve menopause-related symptoms. Most studies have tested the product, Remifemin, a capsule form of black cohosh available over the counter. Estroven is another popular over-the-counter black cohosh formulation.
- Soy products — rich sources of phytoestrogens, which are plant substances that mimic the actions of

estrogens to reduce hot flashes. Ever since the FDA allowed food manufacturers to tout the limited known benefits of soy for menopause symptoms, soy-based food choices have increased on supermarket shelves, including a wide variety of dairy-related and meat substitute products. Talk to your health care provider, however, before eating soy products or taking soy supplements if you’ve ever been told that you’re at risk for blood clots

- Dong quai — results from research studies still question the value of dong quai for menopause symptoms, although some women claim the herb helps with hot flashes. Available in powder, pill, and tincture form
- Vitamin E — a fat-soluble vitamin with antioxidant properties that may reduce the number of hot flashes possibly through the luteinizing hormone-like effects it produces in some women

### Finding reliable resources regarding herbs and dietary supplements

Some good sources of information on the benefits and risks of herbal and dietary therapies include:

- Food & Drug Administration’s MedWatch Program: [www.fda.gov/medwatch](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch)
- American Botanical Council: [www.herbalgram.org](http://www.herbalgram.org)
- Herb Research Foundation: [www.herbs.org](http://www.herbs.org)
- Alternative Medicine Foundation: [www.herbmed.org](http://www.herbmed.org)
- Healthwell: [www.healthwell.com](http://www.healthwell.com)

## How Can I Tell If an Herbal or Dietary Supplement Is Safe?

Because herbal and dietary supplements are not regulated like over-the-counter and prescription drugs, it’s not always easy to tell which ones are safe and which ones are not. They may vary in purity, in the amount of active ingredients, be inadequately labeled, contain other harmful substances, or cause drug interactions. This is

especially true with Chinese herbs manufactured outside of North America. Just like prescription drugs, herbs and dietary supplements can have benefits as well as risks. The FDA has a program called MedWatch that issues safety alerts about different substances, including herbs and dietary supplements.

## Should I Discuss These Supplements With My Health Care Provider?

Be sure to tell your nurse or doctor about any herbs or dietary supplements you may be taking even if they don’t ask about them, or even if you don’t think it’s important enough to mention. Many herbs and dietary supplements have not been adequately studied or there may be very little scientific evidence about their effectiveness, as well as benefits or harms. As such, the best dosage and effectiveness of these substances are not always known. Telling your health care provider about

your use of these products will help to reduce serious side effects or dangerous interactions with other medications you are taking. These side effects can range from diarrhea or bleeding problems to life-threatening heart damage. Some herbs and dietary supplements are also known to dangerously interact with prescription or over-the-counter drugs, or even reduce the effectiveness of other medications you may be taking.

## What Else Can I Do to Take Care of Myself?

Menopause symptoms—especially hot flashes—can be frustrating. But there are some well-known and simple health promotion actions you can take to minimize the effects of menopause on your body and lifestyle:

- eat a nutritious diet
- take calcium and vitamin D supplements
- exercise regularly
- get plenty of sleep
- keep stress levels low



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