

## New Findings on Duration of Vasomotor Symptoms



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The average number of years that hot flashes and night sweats (called vasomotor symptoms) last is far greater than previously known. These findings, published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* in February 2015, come from the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation (SWAN). Nancy Avis, PhD, professor in the PHS Department of Social Sciences and Health Policy and a SWAN investigator, was the report's lead author.

SWAN, is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic observational study of the menopausal transition among 3,302 women at seven sites. These results are particularly compelling due to the large size and diversity of the SWAN cohort and the length of time that SWAN has followed participants.

“We have 14 years of follow-up for these women,” stated Dr. Avis, “and found that frequent hot flashes, defined as occurring at least six days out of the previous two weeks, lasted a median length of 7.4 years.” This is longer than clinical guidelines have typically assumed. For some women in the study, these vasomotor symptoms last only a year or two; but for others they continued for least 14 years. Forty percent of the women in the study were still reporting frequent hot flashes at 14 years of follow-up.

The earlier in the menopause transition that hot flashes began, the longer these symptoms tended to last. Those women who experienced frequent hot flashes while still having regular periods or in early perimenopause had hot flashes lasting a median of 11.8 years, with about 9 of those years after menopause. Hot flashes only lasted a median of 3.4 years for women who did not have them until after their periods stopped. Race/ethnicity played a role, too. African American women had hot flashes for a longer time, compared to white women; Japanese and Chinese women living in the U.S. had them for a shorter time. Unfortunately, we cannot really explain the reason for these racial/ethnic differences, although various hypotheses have been put forward, such as physiologic responses to hormonal variations, genetics, reproductive factors, diet, or some combination of these factors.

These SWAN findings on the persistence of vasomotor symptoms give clinicians and women important new guidance on expectations about the duration of these symptoms and can assist women in making decisions about treatment options.