

DIETITIANS' NEWS

Flax Consumption Reduces the Daily Hot Flash Score by Half

by Diane H. Morris

Eating milled flax daily for 6 weeks cut in half the number and severity of daily menopausal hot flashes, according to recent findings published in the *Journal of the Society for Integrative Oncology*.¹ Physician researcher Sandhya Pruthi and colleagues at the Mayo Clinic recruited 30 women to a pilot study of the effects of milled flax consumption on hot flash and quality of life symptoms.

To be eligible for the study, women must have reported a minimum frequency of 14 bothersome hot flashes per week for one month. Those taking hormone replacement were ineligible. Thirty women were recruited; 28 women completed the study, providing information about their hot flash symptoms.

At baseline, the women recorded their number of hot flashes and health symptoms such as nausea, excessive sweating, joint or muscle pain, headache, nervousness and negative mood swings. Women were then asked to consume 40 g (4 tbsp) of milled flax daily for 6 weeks. They were instructed to drink a minimum of 150 mL (1/2 cup) of liquid per tbsp of flax consumed (600 mL total). Participants completed weekly diaries of their hot flashes and quality of life symptoms. At the end of the 6-week period, they completed a quality of life questionnaire. The main outcome was the hot flash score, which measured hot flash frequency and severity.

After 6 weeks of eating flax, the mean decrease in the hot flash score was 57%. The mean number of hot flashes decreased from 7.3/day at baseline to 3.6/day after 6 weeks of consuming milled flax. Participants reported being less angry and fatigued, having fewer negative mood swings and chills, and experiencing less joint/muscle pain and sweating by the end of the flax intervention period.

These findings agree with a previous report by Lemay and colleagues at Laval University in Québec, Canada, who reported that 25 women who consumed milled flax (40 g/day) for 2 months experienced a significant reduction in mild menopausal symptoms.² In the Lemay study, milled flax was as effective as a daily dose (0.625 mg) of conjugated equine estrogen in relieving mild menopausal symptoms. For women who do not wish to take hormone therapy, consuming milled flax may be an effective alternative for managing some menopausal symptoms.

References

1. Pruthi S, Thompson SL, Novotny PJ, et al. Pilot evaluation of flaxseed for the management of hot flashes. *J Soc Integr Oncol*. 2007;5:106-112.
2. Lemay A, Dodin S, Kadri N, et al. Flaxseed dietary supplement versus hormone replacement therapy in hypercholesterolemic menopausal women. *Obstet Gynecol*. 2002;100:495-504.