

There has been a lot of controversy in recent years about whether soy isoflavones reduce the hot flashes associated with menopause.

And this is an important question!

Because of concerns about increase heart attack risk with hormone replacement therapy (HRT) many women have been looking for natural alternatives to HRT for reducing hot flashes and other symptoms of menopause.

They've been asking whether soy isoflavones are effective, and the answers that they've been getting have been confusing.

For example, you can still find many experts and health professionals who will tell you that soy isoflavones have no proven effect on menopause symptoms.

That is somewhat surprising since two recent meta-analyses (Howes et al, *Maturitas*, 55: 203-211, 2006;

Williamson-Hughes, *Menopause*, 55: 203-211, 2006) and a 2010 expert panel of The North American Menopause

Society have all concluded that soy isoflavones alleviate hot flashes.

However, clear guidance in this area was sorely needed, so Taku et al (*Menopause*, DOI: 10.1097/gme. 0b013e3182410159, 2012) performed an even larger meta-analysis that included 19 published clinical trials - some of which had been published after the previous two meta-analyses were performed.

I've talked about meta-analyses before, so you probably already know that they are very powerful because they combine the results of many individual clinical trials into a single data analysis.

But you also may remember me telling you that meta-analyses can be misleading if they introduce bias because of the kinds of clinical studies that they exclude from their analysis.

So I examined the design of this meta-analysis very carefully. It excluded clinical trials that:

- were not double blind, placebo controlled and designed in such a manner that the placebo was indistinguishable from the soy isoflavone preparation.

- contained other substances in addition to the soy isoflavones (The presence of other substances in the preparation might have influenced the response).

There were several other well justified reasons for excluding some studies from the meta-analysis, but they were technical in nature.

In my opinion this was a very well designed study.

And the results were clear cut. An average of 54 mg of soy isoflavones (some studies used a little less, some a little more) was sufficient to reduce:

- the frequency of hot flashes by 21% - and -
- the severity of hot flashes by 26%

And the results were highly statistically significant.

So if you are suffering from hot flashes and are wondering whether soy isoflavones will put out the fire, the answer appears to be YES.

That's the good news.

The bad news is that 21-26% is not a huge effect.

And, if you look at the individual clinical studies it is apparent that the response is highly variable. Some women experience major relief from hot flashes and other menopause symptoms, while other women experience little or no relief.

The reason for this variability is not known, but it is likely that the effectiveness of soy isoflavones on reducing hot flashes is modified by other components of the diet and by lifestyle factors such as obesity, exercise and stress.

My take on this is that soy isoflavones should not be thought of as a "magic bullet" that will make hot flashes go away by themselves, but rather as a proven part of a holistic approach that encompasses a healthy diet, exercise, weight control and stress reduction

To Your Health!

Dr. Stephen G Chaney

P.S. This study used purified soy isoflavones rather than soy protein products for several reasons.

In the first place, many soy protein products on the marketplace use a processing technique that completely removes the isoflavones from the final product.

But, even when the soy protein is processed in such a way that the naturally occurring isoflavones are retained, there is a considerable variation in isoflavone levels from batch to batch because the levels of isoflavones in the soybean itself vary with the season, weather and harvesting conditions.

Of course, most companies don't actually test for the isoflavone content of their final product so they have no idea what level of isoflavones their products provide.

Shaklee does perform periodic tests for isoflavone content of their soy products. When I checked with the home office I was given the following ranges of isoflavone content for Shaklee's soy products:

- Instant Protein Soy Mix, 45-50 mg
- Energizing Soy Protein, 45-50 mg

- Cinch shakes, 24-51 mg

So my recommendation is that if your primary goal is to reduce the severity of hot flashes, the Energizing Soy Protein or Instant Protein Soy Mix is likely to be your best choice.

If your primary goal is to lose or control your weight and/or to maintain or increase muscle mass, the Cinch Shakes are your best choice.

And if your primary goal is just to stabilize your blood sugar and provide constant energy, it really doesn't matter which you use.