



## Healing Foods



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### COOL COMFORT

You can douse the hot flashes of menopause with the right type of phytoestrogens.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK VIKER

There's a reason the Japanese don't have a specific word or phrase to describe hot flashes. While about two-thirds of American women experience these sudden bouts of intense heat, sweating, and dizziness during menopause, only about 10 percent of our Japanese counterparts suffer the same symptoms, according to

estimates from the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. Research suggests the secret lies in Japan's fondness for soy: According to a new analysis in the journal *Menopause*, taking soy-compound supplements is linked to a lowered incidence of hot flashes.

Investigators examined 11 studies in which participants received extracts of isoflavones, plant components that have a weak estrogenlike activity. The success of the treatment seemed to depend on the dose: In five studies, women who consumed more than 15 milligrams of the soy isoflavone genistein daily had a significant decrease in their hot flashes. In all but one of the remaining six studies, however, women taking less than 15 mg of genistein did not see a drop in symptoms.

These findings follow a May 2006 *Journal of the American Medical Association* review of 17 studies in which hot flashes were treated with isoflavones, with mixed results. But the authors of the *Menopause* report argue that previous reviews failed to discriminate between different types of isoflavones, some of which (such as genistein) may be more effective than others. "Genistein is the most studied of the isoflavones, and I do recommend taking supplements containing genistein for reducing hot flashes," says Lesa Werner, N.D., a naturopathic physician in Beverly Hills. In addition to balancing hormones and relieving hot flashes, genistein may help prevent bone loss; it also has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects, Werner adds.

Consuming just one ounce of tofu, soy milk, or soy nuts (but not soybean oil or soy sauce) should provide about 15 mg or more of genistein and help lower the incidence of hot flashes. If you're considering isoflavone supplements, however, consult your doctor first. "A few studies have indicated that some of the soy isoflavones, when taken in lower therapeutic doses, may actually stimulate hyperplasia of breast tissue," cautions Werner; this is an inflammatory condition that could potentially lead to cancers in susceptible individuals.

For her patients, Werner typically suggests Promensil (visit [www.promensil.com](http://www.promensil.com) for more information), a supplement that offers four isoflavones (genistein, biochanin A, daidzein, and formononetin) taken from red clover, an herb that belongs to the same plant family as soy. "Patients usually get relief within two to four weeks and maintain it with regular use," Werner notes.

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