

Soy

For several years soy has enjoyed a reputation as a super food that could prevent conditions such as heart disease and cancer to name a few. While soy is still a good food to include in a balanced diet, recent research has shown that its super-health benefits are more modest than previously thought. Soy is a good source of protein as well as other nutrients such as magnesium, B vitamins, folate and fiber. Here is a review of what the recent research is telling us about some of the health benefits of soy.

- **Heart Disease**

In the past, studies have shown that soy consumption reduces LDL cholesterol by as much as 13%, more recently research has shown that the reduction in LDL cholesterol is closer to 3-4%. Recommended intake for benefit is 25 gm a day.

“Soy products can provide benefit when used in the diet to replace foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol.” –American Heart Association

- **Cancer**

Certain components of soy can have estrogen-like effects on the body which have been shown to both reduce and stimulate tumor growth.

Many cultures that are known for their soy consumption have lower rates of breast cancer. It is now thought that eating soy from an early age provides greater protection from breast cancer. Women with a strong personal or family history of breast cancer should consult with a physician before including soy in their diet.

The use of soy isoflavone supplementation is not recommended. Any therapeutic affect can be achieved from consuming soy products.

- **Diabetes**

Soy is a good source of protein for people with diabetes because it has a low glycemic index and it is rich in insoluble fiber.

- **Menopause**

Some women have reported relief from hot flashes by including soy products or soy isoflavones in their diet. The research confirming this is inconsistent and weak, leading medical professionals to attribute any benefit to a placebo effect. More research is needed in this area.

- **Bone Health**

Studies involving soy protein and bone health have shown some promise though further investigation is needed. The hope is that including soy in the American diet could have a small effect on preventing osteoporosis

Take Home Message:

Soy foods are a good source of protein and fiber and can be part of a balanced and varied diet to promote good health.

Remember that one study does not necessarily make something true or false. Information from many studies must be taken and weighed together in order to create a recommendation.

For the best health information, go to organizations such as the American Heart Association (www.americanheart.org), the American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org), the American Dietetics Association (www.eatright.org), the American Diabetic Association (www.diabetes.org), and the USDA's mypyramid.gov.

References:

1. Schardt D, Soyonara? Tough times for the “miracle bean”, Nutrition Action 33: 8, 2006
2. Palmer S, Today's Dietitian, 8:25-29,2006
3. Cln Nephrol. 64(1):1-11,2005