

EAST-WEST HEALTH JOURNAL

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Soy Is Not a Health Food

Advertising has created the illusion that soy is a safe, natural food with health benefits

We've all seen the constant advertisements for soy products on television, or have seen it in print media or heard about it on the radio. Eating foods like tofu, vegetarian cheeses, veggie burgers, textured vegetable protein and soy-based protein bars, and drinking soy milk is supposed to help lower the risk of heart disease since these foods are "low fat," treat menopausal hot flashes and night sweats and help prevent cancer. When we hear this message we would naturally think, "I want some of that!" However, are these foods truly natural human foods, and do they truly impart full health benefits with no risk? What is the science on this food?

When I first started going to medical conferences around 15 years ago, papers published in the medical literature were discussed about the benefits of soy. As a green and inexperienced practitioner I accepted this on face value (a big mistake with all published medical articles) and began to recommend these products to my patients. After the first few years of doing this, I was disturbed by two very noticeable reactions. More than a few of my patients would come back and tell me that they noticed that as soon as they started drinking a soy-based detoxification or weight loss drink they became bloated and gained weight. The other disturbing observation was that some of my patients with thyroid problems became worse when consuming soy. They would have more hair loss, weight gain, depression, feeling more cold and other worsening symptoms. What was going on? Wasn't this food supposed to help with these symptoms?

As I began to research soy in depth I found that there is far from a scientific consensus that this is a good food. We don't usually hear of the other side of soy because large agribusiness corporations, who grow over 90% of the soy in the U.S. (plus, most of these crops are genetically modified, which is another area of controversy) dominate the print and broadcast media with ads to sell their product. Organically grown soy and its various products as sold in health food stores is no better from a biochemistry point of view.

So what's the problem with soy?

Dr. David Klein, MD, a board-certified anesthesiologist and pain management specialist and former physician on Air Force 2, has recorded a CD on the subject.

"<http://www.stages-of-life.com>"

As he points out, cattle, in the last six weeks of their lives, are sent to feed lots where they are fed a diet of soy and corn. Thirty percent of their entire body weight is gained in this time period. Soy is not their natural food, grass is, but agricultural researchers have found that soy will fatten the cows up quickly. Why is this? A 1971 study found that soy inhibited protein digestion (*J Sci Food Agri* 1971 Oct;22:526-535). With the loss of protein absorption, one can gain a lot of weight. Soy also blocks the absorption of key vitamins and minerals (*Soy Protein and Human Nutrition*, Harold L Wilcke and others, eds, Academic Press, New York, 1979; *Brain Res* 1983;288:393-395; *Journal of Food Composition and Analysis* 1989;2:67-68), increases the risk of hypothyroidism, autoimmune thyroid disease and thyroid cancer (*J Am Coll Nutr* 1990;9:164-167; *Pediatrics* 1995 Jul;96(1 Pt 1):148-50; Searle CE, ed, *Chemical Carcinogens*, ACS Monograph 173, American Chemical Society, Washington, DC, 1976), increases risk of pancreatic, stomach and colon cancer (Messina MJ and others. Soy Intake and Cancer Risk: A Review of the In Vitro and In Vivo Data," *Nutrition and Cancer*, 1994, 21:(2):113-131; Harras A, ed. *Cancer Rates and Risks*, 4th Edition, 1996, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute; *International Journal of Epidemiology* Oct 2000; 29(5):832-6; *J Nutr* 2002 Sep;132(9):2605-8), it increases Lp(a), or Lipoprotein (a), a key marker of cardiovascular disease (Nilhausen K and Meinertz H. Lipoprotein(a) and dietary proteins: casein lowers lipoprotein(a) concentrations as compared with soy protein. *Am J Clin Nutr* 1999;69:419-25), it increases the risk of hypospadias (a birth defect involving the penis), underdeveloped testicles and penis (North K and Golding J. A maternal vegetarian diet in pregnancy is associated with hypospadias. The ALSPAC Study Team. Avon Longitudinal Study of Pregnancy and Childhood. *BJU Int* 2000 Jan;85(1):107-113; Ross RK. Effect of in-utero exposure to diethylstilbesterol on age at onset of puberty and on post-pubertal hormone levels in boys," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 1983, May 15;128(10):1197-8), it increases the risk of Alzheimer's and cognitive decline (White L. Association of High Midlife Tofu Consumption with Accelerated Brain Aging. Plenary Session #8: Cognitive Function, The Third International Soy Symposium, Program, November 1999, page 26), it damages the lining of the small intestine creating symptoms similar to Celiac disease (Olguin MC and others. Intestinal alterations and reduction of growth in prepuberal rats fed with soybean [Article in Spanish]. *Medicina (B Aires)* 1999;59:747-752), and there is much, much more anti-soy scientific literature. Lastly, soy has not yet received a Generally Regarded As Safe (GRAS) status from the FDA (FDA ref 72/104, Report FDABF GRAS – 258; Evaluation of the Health Aspects of Soy Protein Isolates as Food Ingredients. Prepared for FDA by Life Sciences Research Office, Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, 9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20014, Contract No, FDA 223-75-2004, 1979). The only soy products safe for consumption are soy sauce and tempeh, since the fermentation process to create these foods removes the isoflavones that create the problem.

Okay, so now we're convinced that soy is not all it's advertised to be, and we're not going to use tofu, soy protein powders and so on any more, so we're safe, right? Not quite. We have to be aware of all of the places soy is hidden. It's used in some fast food restaurant burgers, added to lunch meats and sausages, disguised as "textured vegetable protein" and soy lecithin. These all have to be eliminated from the diet. Read labels. The other category is restaurant fried foods. French fries and other deep-fried foods have long been cooked in vegetable shortening, which is hydrogenated oil or trans fat, and a significant risk factor for obesity, heart disease and Type II diabetes. Because of this large restaurant chains began announcing earlier in 2007 that they were going to phase out trans fats and switch to a "healthier" oil, which, as it turns out, is soy oil in most cases. Independent local restaurants are doing much the same. Soy oil, unfortunately, contains the isoflavones that create the problems noted in the above studies. Many people, me included, love to eat out at restaurants, but we need to be aware that the more of this we do the more risk we have of being exposed to soy products. I've found that the less I eat out the more I can control my weight. We have to choose wisely. I've also stopped buying salad dressings and commercial mayonnaise. If you read labels you'll find that soy is increasingly being used as the oil of choice. It is .so quick and easy to make your own, and it's a lot cheaper. Homemade mayonnaise is also a snap to make (put 1 egg in a food processor, add a healthy oil like olive oil or grapeseed oil in a thin, threadlike stream while the food processor is running. In about a minute or two you have mayonnaise. Season with salt and/or pepper to taste. You can also add flavorings like garlic, Dijon mustard, basil, lemon juice, etc.).

You have to read labels. Look for soy meal, textured vegetable protein, lecithin or soy lecithin and soy oil as additives or ingredients and try to avoid them as much as possible.

I hope you've found this article useful and informative. Let us know if you have any questions or would like more references.

Some more references:

"The Whole Soy Story: The Dark Side of America's Favorite Health Food"

By Kaayla T. Daniel (NewTrends Publishing, Inc., March 10, 2005), ISBN-10: 0967089751

"<http://www.westonaprice.org>" (click on "Soy Alert")

Websites:

"<http://www.foodnetwork.com>"

"<http://www.epicurious.com>"

These have many recipes for salad dressings and mayonnaise (flavored

mayonnaise is also known as “aioli”). From simple vinaigrettes to more complex creamy dressings the recipes are quick and simple in most cases. Where some recipes call for ingredients we don’t want to add, such as sugar or canola or soy oil, we can easily substitute better choices such as agave syrup or stevia for the sweetener, and olive oil, grapeseed oil, walnut oil, sesame oil and so on for canola or soy oil. It takes much less time to make your own dressings than it takes to drive to the grocery store and buy a commercial dressing.

For cooking oils at home choose traditional oils and fats that have been in the human diet for thousands of years. Animal fats including butter, pork lard, duck fat, beef suet and so on, and plant oils like olive oil, seed and nut oils and coconut oils have been in the human diet since our ancestors discovered fire. These are safe and healthy to use.