

The Great Soy Debate

In my office I see quite a few vegetarians, vegans and the like. Health conscious sorts with sincere dedication to trying to do the right thing and I applaud them for their resolve. But, as a practitioner, I must question where they get their information. Was it from a trained professional in nutrition or from someone or somewhere that has a financial interest?

One of my clients recently brought in their annual blood test results that indicated very low iron. This client was a devout daily consumer of soy products as “someone” told him that soy was best for vegetarians.

I jumped into heavy research on the benefits of soy consumption because, as they say, “Asians eat a ton of soy and have a lower rate of obesity, heart disease and breast cancer. So, clearly soy was the miracle food that keeps Asians so healthy. Right?”

In one article I read about the amazing benefits of Soybeans boasting prevention of osteoporosis, improves digestive health, weight and diabetes management, prevents heart attacks and strokes, lowers cholesterol, prevents neural tube defects, prevents cancer and so on. WOW! Amazing stuff! Then, I researched the sites that made these health claims and all of them either sold soy products or had a financial interest in soy.

Soy turned out to be one of the most controversial foods in the world!!

Most soy crops come from the USA, known for using GMO's, and are mainly produced for soybean oil which is high in Omega 6 fatty acids, not Omega 3's. We need 2 times more Omega 3's than Omega 6 fatty acids to prevent inflammation and all sorts of health concerns. In a scientific abstract, test results revealed soy had over 13 times more inflammation-causing Omega 6's than Omega 3.

What remains after the fat is extracted is soybean meal, which is only about 50% protein. This is used to feed livestock. To produce the isolated soy protein, it is highly processed which reduces the protein content even more.

If you consume soy to build fat-burning muscle, a better option would be pea protein as it has more muscle-building arginine. Soy does lower testosterone responses and doesn't blunt cortisol, the hormone that breaks down muscle tissue, as well as other protein supplements.

While soybeans are rich in micronutrients, they also contain phytates which block absorption of minerals, explaining my client's iron deficiency.

The large amounts of Isoflavones in soy can cause reduced estrogen activity due to blocking the actual, more potent estrogen from binding, or it can lead to an increased activity due to the isoflavones activating the estrogen receptors, which is harmful for those at risk of breast cancer.

The isoflavones in soy also function as goitrogens, which are substances that interfere with thyroid function.

In baby formula, one study showed that girls fed soy formula were more likely to go through early puberty and menstrual problems in adulthood while men displayed lower testosterone responses and lower sperm counts. It is very high in manganese which may lead to neurological problems and ADHD. Another concern is that it is high in aluminium. Breast milk is best, but milk-based formula is a much better option than a soy-based formula.

Bottom line is the Asians mostly consume fermented soy like natto, miso and tempeh and in very small amounts. They also consume more fruits of the sea and an abundance of vegetables.

After all the research, I've concluded I will still consume VERY small amounts of fermented soy products and an occasional well-cooked edamame treat but must say Bye-Bye to a soy latte!

So, before choosing soy products, analyse your reasons and health condition with a medical professional trained in nutrition first. You might just be saying "Step away from the soy and no one will get hurt!".

To Your Health!

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