



FOOD & DINING

Get the scoop on soyfoods' health benefits

The prevalence of soy products in recipes and ready-made foods has skyrocketed in recent years. Soy-based milk products and others that substitute soy with more traditional ingredients are no longer relegated to the outskirts of the neighborhood grocery store. While soy is being consumed in greater numbers than in decades past, some people are still unaware of the various health benefits and advantages to including soy in their diets.

Soyfoods provide a number of nutritional benefits for people of all ages. According to the Soyfoods Association of North America, recent studies have indicated that eating soy at an early age may help protect against some diseases, including breast cancer, later in life. Soy also may help improve cognitive function.

People largely turn to soy to maintain a healthy weight and control their cholesterol, as soy can replace foods that are higher in saturated fat, calories and cholesterol. For example, a glass of whole milk contains 150 calories and eight grams of total fat. Soy milk, however, comes in between 80 and 100 calories and may have roughly four grams of fat. The fat is mostly healthy fats, as there

are only trace amounts of saturated fat in soy products.

Soy also has cholesterol-lowering properties and can be beneficial to those who are lactose intolerant. Vegetarians and vegans routinely turn to soyfoods as a main protein source.

Soyfoods can offer a number of healthy benefits, including providing a lean protein source that is lower in saturated fats than other forms of protein. Calcium-fortified soymilk offers the same nutritional value as cow's milk but can still be consumed by those who are lactose intolerant. Soy can help many people maintain healthy weights, and soyfoods promote cardiovascular health.

While soyfoods can be beneficial, such foods are not perfect. Allergies to soy are possible, and as with any dietary supplement, moderate consumption may be all that's necessary to provide nutritional benefits. Overconsumption of soy may not provide the desired results.

One concern regarding soy is its relationship to genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. Reports suggest that the vast majority of soybeans produced in the United States are GMOs. While these soybeans are primarily used for livestock

feed, many foods that people eat also contain GMO soybeans. The jury is still out with regard to the impact that GMO foods have on personal health. Proponents of GMOs say their use makes agricultural products safer and more affordable. GMO crops may be resistant to pests, eliminating the need for herbicides and pesticides. But opponents of GMOs say that they may be harmful, as they might have less nutritional value, incite allergic reactions, cause problems with liver function and be harmful to the planet.

Individuals who still want to enjoy soy products such as tofu, miso, tempeh, soy sauce, soy milk, and foods that contain soy lecithin, an emulsifier, can opt for organic products and those that specifically advertise no GMO ingredients. More and more food manufacturers are heeding consumer demand for foods that do not contain GMOs, and producers of soyfoods are no exception. Brands like Silk(R), Tofurky(R), Wildwood(R) and Eden Foods(R) produce soy products that are GMO-free. Read labels to determine if soy products contain GMOs.

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