

Soy in the News

New health claims about soy foods may soon be appearing on supermarket shelves. What do you need to know about soy foods and your health?

Soy and Heart Disease

The Food and Drug Administration allows a health claim on food labels about soy and heart disease. Why? Studies show that about 25 grams of soy protein per day lowers total cholesterol, especially LDL cholesterol (the so-called "bad" cholesterol). Soy foods that have 6 1/4 grams of protein in each serving (1/4 of the daily 25 grams based on 3 meals and a snack) would be able to state on the food label that, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, the food may reduce the risk of heart disease.

What foods contain soy protein?

Choose foods such as calcium fortified soy milk, soybeans, foods made with soy flour, tofu, tempeh and meat substitutes like vegetarian burgers. Another source of soy protein is textured soy or vegetable protein (TSP, TVP) which is used in place of ground beef in chili or tacos.

Does soy protein have other health benefits?

Soy protein contains isoflavones. These phytochemicals (plant substances) may: 1) protect against breast and prostate cancer; 2) make bones stronger; 3) reduce "hot flashes"; and 4) reduce heart disease (see "Soy and Heart Disease" above). We need more studies on isoflavones before we recommend soy for these symptoms or diseases.

Why not take a pill that contains isoflavones?

- There is more than one kind of isoflavone and we do not know which is best or if several work together to prevent disease.
- Are isoflavones in pill form as effective as isoflavones from food? We don't know.
- Pills are expensive way to get the benefits of soy.
- Pills are not regulated or standardized with regard to how much isoflavones they contain.
- Soybeans are low in fat and saturated fat and they have no cholesterol. They also contain fiber, iron, zinc and calcium. If you take a pill you will not get these nutritional benefits.

References: 1. Raidl, M. "Ah Soy," *The Communicator*, University of Idaho, March 1999, pages 11-14.
2. [U.S. Soyfoods Directory](#)

Written By: Ellen Schuster, M.S., R.D.
Former Nutrition and Food Specialist
OSU Extension Service
Family and Community Development Program

You may reproduce, but please credit Oregon State University Extension Family and Community Development, <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/fcd/index.php>