



The Perfect Plant Protein: Soy

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I think that we can all agree that one of the best ways to live a healthy life is maintaining a healthy diet and exercising regularly. As a medical doctor, who early in my career chose to focus on understanding nutrition's impact on our bodies, I am a proponent of a balanced diet that includes healthy plant-based foods – especially soy protein.

Obesity is linked to many potentially [lethal health conditions](#) including, heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. As the founding director of UCLA's Center for Human Nutrition, I have spent decades researching the impact of plant-based proteins – [such as soy](#) – on patients vs. a meat-based protein diet. Substituting soy protein and other plant proteins for high-fat animal meats can result in better weight control and lower cholesterol and blood pressure levels, although changing one's diet is not a substitute for seeking medical advice or treatment for these conditions. Reducing extra calories, saturated fat, and cholesterol from meats and substituting soy protein in shakes and foods can help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight, which will also support healthy immune function.

How to choose the source of protein that's best for you?

With consumers seeking more plant-based proteins and many choices, including rice, beans, quinoa, pea, soy, and others, it can be tough for consumers to know which plant-based proteins are best for them. The truth is, not all plant-based proteins are created equal. Unlike the other plant-based proteins, soy is the only one considered a complete protein. Soy contains all 21 amino acids, including the nine essential amino acids that the body cannot make. The essential amino acids can come from the foods we eat. Soybeans are also a good source of fiber, minerals, and complex carbs. Soy protein contains phytonutrients called soy isoflavones, which act as antioxidants, and they feed healthy gut bacteria, making them "prebiotics." Soy may also benefit the heart. Some studies have shown that 25 grams of soy protein a day, as part of a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease, although the total scientific evidence is not conclusive.

With so many health benefits, why does soy sometimes receive a bad rap?

Several years ago, there were reports that soy had a link to breast cancer. However, scientific research has debunked this premise, and there is no evidence linking soy consumption to breast cancer. Based on several studies, the American Cancer Society concludes there is no harm from eating soy protein or soy foods, and there is mounting evidence that nutrients in soy foods may lower the risk of [breast cancer](#). Research has also negated the myth that soy consumption could cause enlarged breasts in men. In fact, the study showed that soy had no significant effects on men, including any impact on total testosterone levels, another myth about soy.

Now that you understand the joy of soy, there are many ways to add soy to your diet. Foods rich in soy include edamame (whole soybeans), tofu, tempeh, and a convenient, on the go option, a soy protein meal replacement shake. Soy is indeed the perfect protein and an essential addition to a healthy diet. As the medical community continues to study how people can best protect themselves against any viral infections now or in the future, in addition to frequent handwashing,

face masks, and social distancing, a balanced diet, and lifestyle that includes healthy proteins like soy and regular exercise can help our bodies stay fit and strong.