

Our Degenerating Opinion of Soy

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Because I spent the majority of my life as a vegetarian and because protein-dense soy foods such as tofu were stereotypical staples of the 1990's vegetarian diet, I vividly remember a time in which the people who thought consuming soy was detrimental to your health were the same people who fervidly used the words "Zionist" and "illuminati" more than once a day, invested the bulk of their income in gold and homemade napalm, and thought the mass suicides orchestrated by Rev. Jim Jones were the results of a government experiment in mind control. This time was not very long ago.

Last year, while preparing a speech to instruct people how to maintain a healthy vegetarian diet, a quick Google search for "soy" persuaded me to humbly withhold mention of the newly controversial food. Though I was still very skeptical as to the amount of sound and congruent logic used by the paranoid webmasters to arrive at their decisions to condemn and completely ban soy from their diets, I decided to risk erring on the side of caution by heeding their poorly-articulated warnings of soy phytoestrogens making male babies turn gay and grow breasts. At this time, the seemingly logical reasons to avoid soy that were accessible to the general, computer owning public, came from a few insufficiently documented case studies - often first-hand accounts

posted by female vegans on internet forums suggesting that their regular consumption of gratuitous amounts of soy caused them menstrual irregularities. Other than that, the legume was widely hailed as a heart-healthy, cancer-suppressing, low fat source of protein, iron, calcium, and oddly, vitamin B12.

Today however, a Google search for "soy" will yield countless webpage results featuring articles written by people with PH.D.s, claiming that the consumption of soy promotes brain atrophy and breast cancer, in addition to menstrual irregularity, and citing timely research to back up their claims. It has been noted by dietitians that the acute levels of the antinutrient phytic acid in soy foods can inhibit absorption of the essential dietary minerals zinc, iron, copper, and magnesium. Plant estrogens, or "phytoestrogens," which can similarly be found in great abundance within soy, interfere with the estrogen receptors in our bodies, and are now commonly believed to be among the assailants responsible for tumor growth, male infertility, and hypothyroidism. Also,

soy foods produced in the United States are often contaminated with aluminum, the consumption of which has long been shown to be correlated with Alzheimer's disease.

The fact that, in my lifetime, popular science has went from declaring such a commonly used ingredient ambrosia for mortals, to deeming it the dietary equivalent of anthrax is disenfranchising, and speaks volumes about the pithiness of our knowledge of the scientific discipline that is seemingly most essential for the preservation of life: nutrition. The fact that the majority of Americans (three out of four) still think soy is a health food speaks testaments of the effectiveness of marketing, the apathy we have towards our health, and our general ignorance of contemporary scientific finds and trends.

It's easy to believe that the ongoing, yet recently one-sided debate over the safety of soy is only pertinent to vegetarians, vegans, and the lactose intolerant, as no omnivore with the ability to metabolize lactose or obtain 40-50 grams of protein a day without the aid of dietary supplements would subject her-

self to the very subtle, yet cringe-inducing taste of tofu or soy-milk by her own leave. Rather, just as our nation's infrastructure was built on the assumption that gasoline would always be cheap and plentiful, it seems that the modern diet was built on the assumption that soy is a healthy food, or at least will always be widely regarded as a healthy food. To realize this, next time you go grocery shopping, pretend you have an extremely sensitive case of soybean allergy that prohibits you from ingesting even trace amounts of soy-derived ingredients. Doing this, I found it impossible (not extremely difficult, but impossible) to find a brand-name loaf of bread in the Chambersburg Wal-Mart that did not contain soybean oil, soy dough, or soy lecithin. Similarly, I found it extremely difficult to find any product within the store in which cocoa and soy didn't coincide. According to Dianne Gregg, champion of the soy-free diet and author of the recently published book *The Hidden Dangers of Soy*, over 60% of foods on supermarket shelves contain soy-derived ingredients. To make things worse, many of these soy-derived ingredients can slip under the radars of even the most thorough label-readers, for companies may list these ingredients using vague terms such as "stabilizers," "emulsifiers," or "natural flavors" without specifying origin to hide the presence