

Soy and Breast Cancer

Experts agree that breast cancer survivors can safely eat soy foods.

There has been confusion about the connection between soy and breast cancer. New research suggests that soy foods may decrease the risk of breast cancer recurrence in women with a history of the disease.

While most experts agree that the evidence is not strong enough to *recommend* that all women with a history of breast cancer eat more soy, eating soy foods does appear to be safe and possibly helpful for female breast cancer survivors.

Soy Confusion

Some nutrients in soy have chemical structures that look a bit like the estrogen found in a woman's body. This is where the term *phytoestrogen* comes from.

However, phytoestrogens are not the same thing as female estrogens. **Soy foods do not contain estrogen.**

Recent Evidence

There have been several large studies looking at soy intake of thousands of women for many years. These observational studies show that women who regularly eat soy have lower breast cancer risk than women who do not eat soy. Some of these studies also suggest that breast cancer survivors who consume soy foods have a lower risk of breast cancer recurrence compared with women who do not eat soy foods.

Current observational studies cannot prove cause and effect—that is, they cannot prove that soy itself *causes* decreased risk of breast cancer and its recurrence. However, these studies are reassuring in affirming that **soy foods do not increase breast cancer risk**. They point toward a protective effect of soy on breast health, regardless of other lifestyle and diet choices.

Food First

Soy foods are a healthy option, while soy supplements may not be. The research on soy and breast health has looked at soy foods, not supplements. If you require extra calories during cancer treatment from a liquid nutritional supplement, the soy protein in this type of product is not a problem. However, soy pills and isoflavone-enriched powders should be avoided.

If you're a woman concerned about breast health, choose healthy, whole soy foods, such as tofu, tempeh, soymilk, and edamame.

Don't use soy powders and pills. The occasional soy protein bar or snack food is fine, but as with all plant foods, the less processed the food, the better.

Stop Soy Fear

In the end, feel confident in whatever choice you make about soy foods. Eat these foods if you enjoy them, or skip them altogether if soy isn't to your liking.

References and Resources

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