**Soy & Women’s Health**

**Soyfoods and Breast Cancer Prevention**

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**Introduction**

- Cancers are preventable chronic disease related to lifestyle factors. Evidence indicates that of all cancer-related deaths, 25–30% are due to tobacco, 30–35% are linked to diet, 15–20% are due to infections.\(^1\)
- For women, the most common type of cancer diagnosed is breast cancer, with nearly 1.7 million new cases worldwide diagnosed in 2012. The highest incidence of breast cancer was in Northern America and Oceania; and the lowest incidence in Asia and Africa.\(^2\)
- The U.S. National Cancer Institute first began to research the role of soyfoods in cancer prevention more than 20 years ago.\(^3\) It was speculated that soyfood intake may be one reason for the relative low rates of breast cancer among Asian populations.
- Soybeans contain a number of possible chemopreventive (anticancer) compounds and are essentially a unique dietary source of particular class of anticancer compounds, isoflavones.\(^3, 4\)

**Soy and Breast Cancer Prevention**

- A meta-analysis that included eight Asian epidemiologic studies found higher soy intake was associated with a 29% decreased risk of breast cancer.\(^5\)
- Importantly, evidence suggests consumption of soyfoods during childhood or adolescence to achieve breast cancer protective effects, as epidemiological data shows the consumption of one to two servings of soyfoods* per day early in life may reduce breast cancer risk by 25-50% later in life.\(^5-8\)
  
  [*One serving: 1 cup of soymilk or ½ cup of tofu]

**Soy Benefits in Women Diagnosed with Breast Cancer**

- There were old findings from in vitro and rodent studies which raised concerns about consumption of soyfoods by women with breast cancer or by those at high risk of developing this disease.\(^9\)
- Extensive clinical research shows that neither isoflavones nor soyfoods adversely affect markers of breast cancer risk.\(^10, 11\)
- Furthermore, prospective epidemiologic data involving over 11,000 U.S. and Chinese women with breast cancer show that post-diagnosis isoflavone intake is associated with a statistically significantly reduction in the risk of recurrence and breast cancer mortality.\(^12, 13\)
- Both the American Institute for Cancer Research and the American Cancer Society hold the position that women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer can safely consume soyfoods in moderation.\(^14, 15\)
- The World Cancer Research Fund International recently concluded there are indications of links between soyfood consumption and better survival after breast cancer.\(^16\) There is also limited evidence that suggests breast cancer survivors who eat more foods containing soy after diagnosis may have a lower risk of dying from the disease.\(^16\)

**Conclusions**

- Evidence suggests that soy consumption during childhood and adolescence can reduce breast cancer risk. Claims that soyfoods are contraindicated for breast cancer patients are unsupported by the clinical and epidemiologic evidence. The former shows neither soy nor isoflavones adversely affect markers of breast cancer risk and the latter shows post-diagnosis soy intake reduces breast cancer recurrence and mortality.
References:


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