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A Consumer's Guide to Soy Terms

By Marjorie Geiser

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Although you may have heard about soy and all of its health benefits, you may not have figured out how to incorporate it into your diet, yet. There are so many products available; figuring out exactly what they are may seem overwhelming. Here is an explanation of terms of various soy products to help you understand and evaluate which products are for you.

In October 1999, the USDA approved the statement, "Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol that include 25 grams of soy protein a day may reduce the risk of heart disease." This health claim is based on research showing that soy protein can lower total cholesterol and LDL ("bad") cholesterol.

Soy foods typically fall into two categories: Traditional and soy protein products (SPP). Traditional foods are soymilk, tofu, miso, tempeh and edamame. Soymilk is made from ground soybeans mixed with water, cooked and then filtered. Tofu is a cooked, pureed soybean that is then offered in different textures. Miso is a seasoning from cooked, fermented soybean paste. Tempeh is cooked, fermented soybean cakes, and edamame is the whole, green soybeans. SPP's are made from soy protein concentrate, soy flour or ISP (see below). Examples are soy burgers, cereals, etc.

Textured soy protein (TSP) is probably what many people unfamiliar with soy products think of when they hear the term 'soy foods'. TSP, also known as Texturized Vegetable Protein, is made from compressed soy flour or other soy ingredients and is used as an extender in other foods products. It is available as a dried and granular product that is rehydrated with boiling water. It takes on a texture similar to ground beef or stew meat.

Isoflavones are compounds found naturally in soybeans and soy foods. They have a chemical structure similar to estrogen and have some estrogen-like effects. This is why isoflavones are also referred to as phytoestrogens. However, isoflavones also have non-hormonal properties which likely affect humans. They are thought to have coronary and skeletal benefits, may relieve hot flashes, and might reduce the risk of certain cancers. One serving of traditional soy foods has about 20-30 mg isoflavones.

Isolated soy protein (ISP) is also referred to as soy protein isolate on a label. ISP is prepared by removing most of the non-protein components from soybeans. By definition, it is at least 90% protein and is essentially carbohydrate-free and fat-free. It is often added to pasta, fruit beverages and energy bars for extra nutrition.

Soy foods made from the whole bean are an excellent source of Omega-3 fatty acids. The American Heart Association recommends that Omega-3 fats are beneficial for heart health. These fats are believed to help in many other conditions related to inflammation and disease.

Supplements are another source of isoflavones in the diet. Soy isoflavone supplements are available at drug stores, natural food stores, and other retailers in various dosage forms, including tablets, powders, capsules, granules and liquids. Although some experts believe that taking soy isoflavones is

supplement form could do harm by providing too much of a good thing, other experts point out that many supplements, if taken in recommended dosages, don't provide more isoflavones than eating the whole soy foods. For those who have been unable to figure out how to incorporate soy foods into their diet, this may be the solution to getting more soy in their diet.

So, the next time you are shopping, and start looking at all the soy-related terms, use this list to help you sort it out. Experiment: For those of us who were not raised with soy foods, it's just a matter of experimenting with different products that fit into our lifestyle, then developing a taste for a new food that can offer many healthful benefits.

Marjorie Geiser has been teaching health, fitness and nutrition since 1982. She is a nutritionist, registered dietitian, certified personal trainer and life coach. As the owner of MEG Fitness, Marjorie's goal for her clients is to help them incorporate healthy eating and fitness into their busy lives. You can learn more about Marjorie from her website, www.megfit.com, or contact her via email at margie@megfit.com.

Real Soy Sauce

By Dr. Donald A. Miller

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When I was growing up, I thought soy sauce was salty water with dark coloring and some secret soy and wheat stuff mixed in. That's because my parents did not know any better than to buy LaChoy brand.

Some of the cheap stuff from China is not any better.

Oriental friends introduced me to real home cooked delights that one never finds in a typical Chinese or Japanese

restaurant in this country. They even introduced me to authentic ethnic restaurants.

I gradually learned that there is a tremendous variety in Soy Sauce, whether made with added wheat (Shoyu) or without (Tamari). Some connoisseurs spend as much time studying the character of soy sauces as others do on wines.

Real soy sauce requires many months of fermentation and aging to make, not a few minutes on an automated factory. Some excellent choices are now available in the USA, whether made here or in the Orient. Some are deliberately un pasteurized, for health benefits.

My suggestion is to seek out good brands, then see if they have reduced salt versions.

While you are at it, take a look at Miso as well, preferably not pasteurized.

Bon appetite.

* Diet with FACTS, not Fat-Burner MYTHS. *

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