

Soy Bean Heads: Deception and Dark Side of Soybean Miracle

By Simon Yu, MD

I believe there are millions of people who have been deceived. Unknowingly they have been converted into “Soy Bean Heads” who believe in the “Soybean Miracle.” The soybean miracle implies that soy can save humankind from protein starvations, help women with menopausal symptoms, prevent breast and prostate cancer, and is as near a perfect food as can exist.

One cannot dare tell a Soy Bean Head not to eat soy without a lecture coming back at you on the infinite virtues of soy. Soy Bean Heads try to convert everyone to soy products of all types. They believe soy should be eaten in all forms. They tell you that if you’re not feeling up to par, just eat more soy. The irony is that soy may be the reason you’re not up to par in the first place.

I don’t blame these individuals. I’m not making fun of them either, just jesting with them. However, I am very serious about their buy-in to a deception. Why am I so concerned about the unrestricted use of soy products?

Soybeans came into common use in China during the Chou dynasty (1134-246 BC). The soybean was considered one of the five sacred grains, along with barley, wheat, millet and rice. However, the soy plant was initially used as animal feed and for crop rotation. Soy is a legume which means it puts nitrogen back into the soil. Therefore, after a field is grown with crops that deplete the nitrogen from the soil, soy would be grown in that field and nitrogen would be added back to the soil.

Soybeans were not used for human consumption until sometime during the Chou dynasty. At that time, soybeans were consumed by humans only as the fermented products of tempeh, natto, miso and soy sauce. Fermented soy is very different than unfermented soy.

Later, the Chinese were able to precipitate soybeans with calcium sulfate or magnesium sulfate to make a smooth bean curd called tofu. Tofu is not a fermented product. Soy then became widely used throughout Asia. Soy products have been traditionally served with other foods like fish broth, sea food, pork and other meats. Soy was not the major source of protein in their diets.

Today, millions of Americans are consuming soy milk and soy formula. Women especially are consuming soy milk for menopausal symptoms. Many infants are being fed soy formulas. Soy milk and soy infant formula have never existed in human history until now.

We are in a giant human experiment on a grand scale. Some of the symptoms caused by soy include acne, canker sore, inflammation and infection of the mucous membrane lining of the eyelids and conjunctiva, dermatitis, diarrhea, eczema, hives, heart palpitation, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, panic attack and PMS like symptoms. I conservatively estimate that about 10% of my patients are allergic to soy. Many of them don’t even know this until we test them.

One of the major side effects of soy is that it blocks the absorption of essential minerals. This results from soy’s high content of phytic acid or phytates which especially block zinc, calcium, magnesium, and iron. Only a long period of fermentation will significantly reduce the phytate contents of soybeans. Tofu and soy milk have a high content of phytates.

Other negative effects include the following. Soy has estrogenic effects from the isoflavones and goitrogenic (suppressing thyroid function) effects. Soy also contains trypsin inhibitors (growth inhibitor)

and haemagglutinin, a blood clot forming substance. These negative antinutrient and toxic effects of soy cause a far more harmful impact than a beneficial impact.

Soy protein alone does not provide all the essential amino acids. It needs to be supplemented with lysine either from grains, eggs, dairy, nuts or spirulina. Textured vegetable protein is created by subjecting soybeans to high temperature, high pressure, and the use of acid and alkaline chemicals. Artificial flavorings are then added to cover-up the unpleasant taste. This process does not create a healthy food.

There has been a tragic misunderstanding about soy. Soy products which are not fermented have been regarded in the same light as fermented soy products. But these are vastly different. Fermented soy products have been thought of as the same as industrial, chemically processed textured soy protein products. However, this is not true. Fermented soy has been used for thousands of years in Asia. Fermented soy products reduce or eliminate the phytic acid and phytates in soy.

Although soy protein isolate has been classified with GRAS (Generally Recognized as Safe) status just like casein protein from milk, there is over-whelming evidence to cause great concern regarding soybean products. I am not trying to be an alarmist and add more fear to an already confused public. I think that you must be informed to protect yourself and your family. You should separate fact from fiction. I still eat and enjoy tofu dishes and miso soup occasionally. Soy can be a valuable protein source in limited use. You can enjoy fine Asian foods in the form of miso and tempeh with soy sauce.

However, I strongly urge all patients to avoid unfermented soy products like soy milk and soy yogurt. Consume tofu in moderation for 1-2 servings per week. Dairy products have been demonized for the usage of bovine growth hormone in cows. However, given a choice, unless you are allergic to milk protein, cheese may not be a bad choice to replace soy products.

You can get organic cheese and dairy products that come from cows in which growth hormones and antibiotics aren't used. Also, goat's milk may be a good choice. Goat's milk is easier to digest and less allergenic than cow's milk and has similar protein and calcium content. For more information on soy, you can look at a study done by Mary G. Enig, Ph.D. at www.ratical.org/ratville/soydangers.html.

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