



Weekly bulletin, volume 1, #3  
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### **Edamame (*pronounced Ed-ah-maa-me*)**

This week we are taking on the issue of soy foods and breast cancer risk reduction. Few topics in the science of food's influence on cancer risk have provoked more controversy lately, so it's good to take this one out for some sunshine early in our journey together. It's a good time to re-emphasize some fundamental principles of what we know about using foods for cancer risk reduction, because they apply especially to soy foods.

1. Reducing cancer risk through food choices has to do more with the variety and combinations of foods in the diet than one single food: there is no single magic food that you can concentrate on to the exclusion of a balance.
2. It's better to get your cancer risk reduction from whole foods than from pills, concentrates, or supplements.
3. There is no 100% guaranteed way to prevent cancers by food choices; the goal is to move yourself into a lower risk group.

So here's what we know about soy foods, and specifically why I am putting edamame at the top of that list. Higher intake of soy foods in a population (such as women in countries of eastern Asia) is associated with lower rates of breast cancer in those countries. Laboratory data and other studies have suggested that soy is most likely to have a protective effect against cancer of the breast if consumed while the breast is still developing, in pre-teen and adolescent girls. There are no good data existing that show that soy foods reduce breast cancer risk if consumed by adult women. Researchers suggest that the protective effects of soy on the breast come from both its *phytoestrogen* properties (its ability to partly block estrogen receptors in the breast) and from high concentrations of a class of compounds called *isoflavones*. The studies on soy's effect on women who already have breast cancer is conflicting, some showing a harmful effect, and some showing a protective effect of higher *isoflavone* intake on survival in breast cancer patients. It is also possible that soy isoflavones can interfere with tamoxifen during cancer treatment. Sound confusing? Here's my conclusion:

Soy is a good food choice, and should especially be encouraged for school age and teenage girls. Adult women can enjoy soy foods, especially if it is one of your legume choices to replace meat as a protein source. **Any woman who already has breast cancer** or is at very high risk because of family history **should avoid eating soy** or soy products. I only recommend getting soy from whole foods and NOT from soy isoflavone concentrates in pills, and NOT from soy protein powders as are often found in instant breakfast drink powders.

Edamame is a great place to start if you are new to soy foods: it is the whole soy bean, boiled and either in the shell (like peas in a pod) or out of it (in which case it looks sort of like a round green lima bean). You will find it served alongside sushi in Japanese restaurants. You can buy it in the frozen food section of the grocery and either heat and serve as an appetizer or snack alone, or put it liberally in a tossed salad. Look for organically grown whenever possible.

***Edamame and red cabbage salad:***

This recipe can be modified in many ways to suite your taste (like good jazz, improvisation is always part of a good salad!); not only is the edamame healthy, but it also adds the cancer fighting properties of red cabbage.

Toss together: spring mix, romaine, or green leaf lettuce (not iceberg), ½ cup finely sliced or shredded carrots, ½ cup chopped red or purple cabbage, a small amount of finely chopped onion, ½ cup of finely chopped fresh tart apple, and ½ cup shelled edamame. Serve with a balsamic vinaigrette dressing or just olive or and vinegar if you prefer. Serves 4.

Along with a cup of soup or some whole grain bread, this makes a delicious and complete lunch.

To your health,

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