

Real Foods That Heal



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Tofu can reduce cancer risk

Now admit it, how many of you would have deleted this e-mail immediately if the subject line had said tofu? Despite its popularity and wide consumption in east Asia, tofu (or bean curd) does not have a great reputation or popularity in America. I personally believe this has to do simply with an unfamiliarity bias, that people don't want to eat foods that they have not known for a long time. Many Americans already eat food with similar textures, tastes and colors without hesitation, so what if we just call it something else? Ratings would go up, I bet.

So what is tofu? Just as cheese is clotted milk with the liquid pressed out, tofu is clotted soy milk. It is a traditional Asian food which has been around for hundreds of years. A calcium salt is used to make the soy milk clot, which adds additional nutritional benefit to the soy. You can buy it in the market in varying degrees of firmness, depending on how you intend to use it in food.

Having said that, let's review briefly the benefits of soy for cancer prevention. A 2006 review of a number of studies of Japanese and Chinese women showed specifically that women with higher intakes of tofu and other soy foods had lower rates of breast cancer. More studies have led scientists to believe that the protective effect of soy on the breast is strongest if consumed while the breast is still developing, in pre-teen and adolescent girls. This is largely attributed to the high concentrations of *isoflavones*, a specific type of flavonoid found almost exclusively in soy. Flavonoids are widely distributed among vegetables and fruits, and are all protective against cancer. Studies have also supported the hypothesis that soy foods reduce the risk of prostate cancer. Controversy has arisen about soy and breast cancer because some studies have suggested that soy proteins can interfere with tamoxifen during cancer treatment; while other studies have shown a protective effect of higher *isoflavone* intake on survival in breast cancer patients.

I am in company with many other highly regarded doctors when I conclude that tofu is an excellent food choice, especially for school age and teenage girls. Tofu is a healthy food in many ways for most adults as well, but I only recommend getting your soy as whole soy foods, not as isolated soy proteins in pills. And any woman who already has breast cancer or is at very high risk because of family history should avoid large amounts of soy until we have further data.

Tofu breakfast smoothie

This is an easy way to get your morning protein, natural fruit carbohydrates and good taste all in an easy breakfast for someone not wanting a lot of time in the kitchen. Take $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of a block of soft tofu (soft works better than firm for this recipe), and place in a blender with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup or more of your favorite berries, fresh or frozen. I like a $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp cinnamon (or more) in the mix as well. Blend until smooth, adding apple juice bit by bit until the texture is as you would drink it. Pause for a moment of mindful gratitude for all that had to happen to get these ingredients into your glass, then enjoy! Experiment with variations on this until you find one to your own liking.

To your health,

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P.S. Your family and friends deserve to know how to reduce their cancer risk by food choices. Please forward this e-mail to them by using the link below.

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