

SOY SOLUTION

Staying Healthy with Dr. Aieta, N.D.



Dr. Aieta,
I have been a vegetarian for six years and consider myself to be in relatively good health. I consume soy products as my primary source of protein. I do eat eggs and some dairy, but more soy than anything. What are your views on soy, and can I be consuming too much?

Jill H.

Eating too much of any food can be problematic. I am a big advocate of eating on more of a rotational basis. I encourage patients to eat a wide variety of foods to prevent allergies or intolerances. Soy, especially over the past few years, has been touted as a health food, with many benefits such as lowering cholesterol and reducing risk of cardiovascular disease, as well as alleviating the symptoms of menopause. These claims are only partially true.

While many Americans think that soy is a staple in the Asian diet, the truth is

that the average daily consumption of soy in China is around two teaspoons, and between six and eight teaspoons in Japan. The Asian diet has soy as a condiment and not as a replacement for animal foods.

It is also a myth that soy foods provide complete protein. Like all legumes, soybeans are deficient in sulfur-containing amino acids methionine and cystine. Modern processing also destroys the amino acid lysine. Many vegetarians are also led to believe that they can get adequate B12 from soy, but the reality is that the compound found in soy that resembles B12 is unusable by the human body. High soy consumption has been shown to increase the body's need for B12.

Many parents are led to believe that soy-based formulas are safe for their infants to consume and are preferred over other formulas. The truth is that soy foods contain compounds called trypsin inhibitors that prevent the body from digesting protein adequately by negatively affecting the pancreas. In test animals, diets high in

trypsin inhibitors led to stunted growth and pancreatic disorders. Soy foods also increase the body's requirement for vitamin D, needed for strong bones and normal growth. There is another compound in soy called phytic acid, which can reduce the bioavailability of iron and zinc, which are required for the health and development of the brain and nervous system.

Soy also lacks cholesterol, likewise essential for the development of the brain and nervous system. Soy contains high amounts of phytoestrogens, which have been implicated in the current trend toward increasingly premature sexual development in girls and delayed sexual development in boys. Some women claim that soy products help with their menopausal symptoms, but I have found that excess soy consumption can suppress thyroid function and slow metabolism, which can lead to more menopausal difficulties. Finally, soy has been shown in numerous animal studies to cause infertility and decreased testosterone levels in men. Tofu

was consumed by Buddhist monks to reduce libido.

So, the take-home message is not to scare you away from soy, but just to make you aware that it, like any other food, should be consumed in moderation and rotated through the diet.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board-certified and licensed Naturopathic Physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com.

GIVE IT A TRY

Women's Fitness with Lisa Thomas

Here's a great, functional exercise for developing your entire posterior chain (glutes and hamstrings) while also enhancing balance and dynamic flexibility. It is called the one-legged dumbbell stiff leg.

This is one of my favorite exercises and it is not only excellent for shaping lean hamstrings (back of legs) and glutes (butt), but also great for improving balance. It can lift your butt, and, if you are an athlete, this exercise is a great dynamic stretch that can help your running speed.

It doesn't look like balance should be an issue with this exercise, but it can be challenging, so don't get discouraged.

Begin with a dumbbell in your right hand. Stand on your left foot with left hand on the waist. Right leg should stay bent, and knees will remain about two to four inches apart through the entire movement.

As the movement descends forward, your spine remains erect and abs are contracted. Think of your body as a seesaw, with your hip as the pivot for movement. The body and planted leg stay straight, not allowing a bend or flexion. As you lean the chest and upper body forward,

the dumbbell will cross over the mid-line of the body and aim for the outside of the left ankle.

Flexibility will play a key role in this exercise. Go as far down as you can comfortably stretch. The abdominal muscles should stay pulled in towards the spine throughout the movement.

Here are some things to remember as you perform this awesome exercise:

1. Keep your back straight as you lean forward, and keep your eyes looking straight ahead. This will prevent your back from rounding and possibly causing injury. Keep your chest upright and proud.

2. This exercise should be done slowly and controlled.

3. As you begin to stand up, squeeze your glutes on the standing leg and keep the leg straight.

4. Return to a completely upright posture each time.

Do this exercise on each leg 10-15 times. Repeat each leg three times.

You can progress with this exercise by adding movement, like walking stiff-legged deadlifts, and have a dumbbell in each hand. Keep your posture with tight abs.

This is just one of a host of new exercises you can add into your arsenal to spice things up for springtime.

Lisa Thomas is a personal trainer/fitness coach in the Greater Springfield area, as well as owner of Thomas Fitness Center and Fit Kidz of Massachusetts. Contact her at (413) 426-5543 or l.fitness@hotmail.com, or visit www.thomasfitnesscenter.com.



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