



Enjoy tofu: Soy scare unfounded

Question: My diet is largely vegetarian, and on some days two of my meals include a soy item. Would you advise me to reduce my use of soy? I'm an active 78-year old man. -- Abe Arkoff, Honolulu.

Answer: Your concern about too much soy may stem from research published by Dr. Lon White last year. His research on Japanese-American men living in Hawaii indicated that men who ate the most tofu experienced an earlier decline in brain function than those who ate less tofu. In this type of study, it is not possible to establish a "cause and effect" relationship.

However, there has been a strong public tendency to establish "guilt by association" for tofu. The problem with jumping to such conclusions is that eating tofu could have nothing to do with more rapid mental decline. It is just as likely that those eating more tofu consumed less meat and fish and therefore also consumed less vitamin B-12.

It is estimated that about 15 percent of people over age 65 develop vitamin B-12 deficiency. One of the many effects of this is a decline in mental function that is similar to that seen in Alz-

heimer's disease. Thus, what the men did not eat could be more important than what they did eat.

Also, it is important to realize that the incidence of Alzheimer's disease is growing all over the world as the world population ages. And the incidence of Alzheimer's disease is no higher in soy eating nations than it is in non-soy eating countries.

Based on their review of a large number of studies, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reports that eating two servings of soy food a day may provide significant health benefits. They recently approved a food label health claim that foods containing soy protein may reduce the risk of heart disease.

Part of the approved wording for this claim states, "Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol that include 25 grams of soy protein a day may reduce the risk of heart disease." Foods high in soy protein that are not too high in fat or sodium can put this claim on their label.

SOY protein is a good quality protein. A 3-ounce serving of tofu has 6 grams of soy protein for soft tofu and up to 12 grams of soy protein for the firm varieties. The amount of protein in soy

burgers varies greatly. Some brands contain as little as 3 grams of protein per burger with others or as much as 15-18 grams of protein per burger.

Recent research indicates that people in your age bracket have greater protein needs than younger adults. You can calculate your recommended protein intake in grams per day by multiplying 0.45 times your body weight in pounds. For younger adults, the number is 0.36.

For those over 60 who rely heavily on any vegetable sources of protein to meet their protein needs, it seems especially sensible to include a vitamin B-12 supplement of 500 to 1,000 micrograms daily. And always remember that a wide variety of foods in the diet is a basic axiom in good nutrition.

If you have a question for Health Options, mail it to Health Options, Features Department, Honolulu Star-Bulletin, P.O. Box 3080, Honolulu, HI 96802. Or Email it to titch@hawaii.edu with Health Options Question as your subject title. Make sure to include your name and phone number or E-mail address.

Alan Titchenal, Ph.D, CNS and Joannie Dobbs, Ph.D, CNS
are nutritionists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences,
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, UH-Manoa.
Dr. Dobbs also works with the University Health Service.
