Dr. Mercola on Soy -- Is Soy a Health Food?

Hi this is Dr. Mercola. Today, we’re going to talk about one of the controversies in health. That is the perception of soy as a health food.

Let me give you a little bit of the history. The reason this is the case is largely related to something that occurred a number of years ago when tropical oils were used in a large part of this country, for many indications and industry.

The tropical oils such as palm or coconut obviously are not grown in the United States because we don’t have a tropical environment, except for Hawaii.

As a result of this, they wanted to shift that. So there was this movement and effort to demonize and vilify those oils to remove them and identify them as health damaging oils, and substitute domestically grown oils like soy and corn and others, but primarily soy.

For the large part, they’ve been very successful and there has been this whole campaign to paint soy in a healthy light.

The information I have to share with you may disappoint and challenge many vegetarians because they use soy as one of their primary sources of protein.

But I’m here to tell you that it’s my strong belief -- and I’ve been studying this very carefully -- that unless you’re having fermented soy, you’re having a problem.

I’ll tell you the reasons why, but fermented soy would be foods like natto, miso, and tempeh. This does not include tofu. Tofu is not fermented so that definitely falls into the category of soy that you want to avoid.

Why do you want to avoid it?

Well, in contemporary society, one of the primary reasons is that somewhere between 90 and probably closer to 95 percent of the soy grown domestically is genetically modified soy.

Why do they do this to soy?

Well they do it because they incorporate a gene into the soy plant that essentially provides resistance against the pesticide called Roundup. Monsanto is the manufacturer of Roundup and also the producer of the seed that produces the Roundup resistance, interestingly.

What happens is that when they plant this Roundup resistant soy, then they are able to spray this toxic pesticide and herbicide in the soy plants. It very effectively kills pretty
much all the plants except for the soy plants so that they’re able to get a very effective harvest and radically decrease the cost of production.

But that doesn’t do anything with respect to the negative side effects and harm of genetically modified foods.

What some of the newer research is showing is that many of the damages and harm really isn’t even occurring in those who eat it. It’s occurring in the second and the third generations.

We know this by studying rats [author’s correction: the study referred to was on hamsters] which have much shorter life spans than we do, so we can see these occurrences at a much accelerated rate.

What some of these recent studies have shown is that by the time you get to the third generation, many of these families of hamsters that have been exposed to these genetically modified foods are actually infertile and sterile.

So these are some of the concerns and they’re certainly many others. I’ve written extensively about this.

We work with Jeffrey Smith, who is one of the leaders in the United States, in a movement towards restricting the use of genetically modified foods in the United States, as they have done in Europe, primarily through consumer awareness and action to motivate industry, because there is no government regulation against it.

It’s just that consumers [in Europe] are aware enough that they refuse to purchase GMO foods.

That’s probably the primary issue. But even if you were fortunate enough to choose the 5% or so of soy that is organically grown, there are still concerns, and let me review this with you now.

One is that there are goitrogens in soy.

Goitrogens are inhibitors of thyroid functions. A common source of soy is soy milk. Many people consume that as an alternative to milk or one of their primary beverages. That really is a concern because you are able to get large amounts of this soy. It’s a significant contributor to thyroid dysfunction or hypothyroidism in women in this country.

So if you’re a woman and you’re struggling with low thyroid function and you’re consuming soy milk, it’s a giant clue to stop drinking soy milk immediately.

As long as we’re talking about women, we can also talk about some of the estrogen components, which are typically the isoflavones, that are in soy. Some actually recommend and use these therapeutically to treat menopausal type symptoms. I believe
the evidence is really controversial whether or not that really works, and even more importantly, it may cause some disturbance in endocrine function. That is definitely a significant concern.

The other component is that there is a phytic acid in there.

Phytic acid is something that will inhibit and impair the absorption of minerals. Sometimes that’s good, especially in postmenopausal women or in most adult men because we tend to have levels of iron that are too high, which can be a very potent oxidant and stress.

It doesn’t necessarily selectively inhibit iron absorption; it inhibits all of the beneficial minerals like magnesium, calcium, copper and zinc and all the important minerals that form as catalysts in very important enzyme functions, so this is something that we need to be aware of.

As I mentioned, tofu is not fermented soy so that is one that should be avoided also.

Some of the other ones that are really common would be soy protein, isolated soy protein powder that you could find in many protein bars, many protein drinks -- powdered drinks that you would put together.

This is really not a naturally produced substance. It’s processed in a way that include an acid wash, and there is aluminum in there and many times MSG is added.

These are things you want to avoid, especially MSG, because we know from fairly clear scientific documentation that it’s an excitotoxin. It can actually lead to neurological damage. So clearly you want to avoid foods with MSG, and soy protein isolate is clearly one of them. So avoid that one for sure.

But perhaps one of the most serious ones that you want to be really cautious about is the soy infant formula.

What we absolutely recommend for every single woman who has a child is to breastfeed. There is just no question.

Interestingly, conventional physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics also recommend this and strongly recommend it for the first six months of life. The evidence is just absolutely beyond overwhelming. This is going to be the absolute best thing -- the type of nutrition or approach of feeding -- possible for the infant.

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons -- many of them may be economic or convenience, or it’s just inability -- many women choose not to breastfeed their child, so then they’re left with options which typically are conventional formulas. Because of the problems with conventional formula, many children are allergic to it so parents choose soy as an option that their child can tolerate.
But unfortunately the soy is far worse than conventional formula (which is not really good at all either).

The reasons why is because typically soy formula is very high in these phytoestrogen components. They can have levels that are 20,000 times higher than birth control pills that reach the child’s blood after consuming these for a long time. [Authors correction/clarification: Infants fed soy formula have up to 20,000 times the amount of estrogen in circulation as those fed conventional formulas.]

But they contain toxic minerals such aluminum and manganese at very high concentrations.

So clearly if you have a child, or you know one of your friends or neighbors who are in this predicament, just tell them to avoid the soy.

There is more information on my site but it’s clearly a formula that should, I believe, be banned from commercial sale.

So what are you going to do if you are unable to breastfeed?

Well, we actually have on our site an infant formula fortification protocol that you can look it up. Just type it into the search engine and it will give you the specific details on how to use regular raw milk combined with other nutrients, such as some of the essential fatty acids and some other components to provide a source of nutrition that will cause your child to thrive, and be able to avoid many of the conventional illnesses that we’re expose to because they’re receiving optimal nutrition.

So that would be the primary recommendation there.

Other forms of soy that are present that you could be exposed to would be soy oil.

It’s an omega-6 oil like many other ones. Normally if you have any type of processed foods, and 95% of foods we eat are processed, it’s going to have this in there. So you really want to stay away from processed foods because most of it has got way too much omega-6 oils.

The omega-6 oils have some essential double bonds -- essential fats -- in there, not “essential” necessarily, but bonds which are susceptible to oxidative damage. So they can be oxidized during the processing. We just get too many of this omega-6. The omega-6 to omega-3 ratio becomes imbalanced, and that can be the cause of many of diseases. So I’d definitely stay away from the soy oil.

Soy cheese is another one, [and] soy yoghurt. These are all foods that have the soy ingredients that I mentioned earlier that can contribute to health problems.
There is a lot more information on this page so you can read more specifics and details, but I would definitely encourage you to read it. If you’re skeptical, review the evidence.

There are also books written about this that document this information in very clear detail with all the sites, all the references, all the validation in the scientific literature, that you’ll need to believe and research just to know that it’s true.

So again, the only form of soy that you really want to consider eating would be natto, for example, which is a fermented soy product that’s a bit of a challenge to get. It’s usually only in Asian food stores but it’s very high in vitamin K2, which is a phenomenal vitamin. Really kind of a partner with vitamin D in producing a variety of many significant benefits, such as cancer reduction and also improving bone density and reducing heart disease.

Probably the single most highest concentration of vitamin K2 on the planet is in this form of fermented soy called natto.

You can also get miso and tempeh. They don’t have the vitamin K2, but these are fermented forms of soy.

The fermentation process, the degradation of the bacteria is actually able to metabolize and breakdown the goitrogens and the other elements that are in soy that I mentioned that are potentially harmful to you -- and the isoflavones.

That’s why the fermented soy is okay. That’s actually a health food, so that one is fine.

Many times, there is just so much information out there. We really are challenged to have the time to really explore carefully how this information was provided, or what the motivations behind spreading that information were. In the case of soy, as I mentioned, the motivations appear to be not to your benefit, but really so that they could promote the sale of the domestic soy in the United States. They increase their profits by doing that.

Really, the purpose of this site is to gather this information, present it to you, to at least open your mind to this possibility; so that you can do your independent research, you can validate this for yourself or your friends or your family. Because the internet is a great resource. It allows you to do this pretty easily.

With this information, there is power so that you can stay away from things that are going to lead you down the wrong path towards illness and disease, and really help you and your family to continue to take control of your health.