



Five Easy Ways to Sneak Soy Protein into Your Diet

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The first written record of the soybean was found in Chinese books dating back to 2838 B.C. Although people in Asia have used soybeans as a primary protein source for centuries, Americans have used them for little more than oil and livestock feed. But things are changing.

In recent months, the humble soybean has captured headlines and the attention of health-conscious consumers everywhere. With good reason — research has shown that incorporating soy protein into the diet provides numerous health benefits, including reducing the risk of heart disease and reducing the levels of LDL, or "bad cholesterol," in the bloodstream. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently issued a recommendation for consumers to integrate 25 grams of soy protein per day into their diets.

While most people are now aware of the health benefits associated with eating more soy protein, what they may not know is how to integrate the FDA's recommended 25 grams per day into their diets. Soy foods are unfamiliar to many. After all, how many people do you know who grew up eating tofu at dinnertime?

The good news is that manufacturers have responded to the demand for soy by producing a vast array of food products, many of which can easily substitute for old standby favorites. Even people who don't spend a lot of time in the kitchen and haven't developed cooking techniques can easily integrate soy protein into their diets. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Substitute Soymilk

Replacing dairy milk with soymilk may be the easiest way to add some soy protein to your daily diet: Eight ounces of soymilk contains 10 grams of protein. Soymilk can be found in the dairy section of most grocery stores. Look for vanilla- and chocolate-flavored soymilk, in addition to plain.

Try adding soymilk to a smoothie with a banana, some frozen fruit, ice, and a little juice. Add some soy protein powder for a bigger nutritional boost.

Substitute plain soymilk for milk in your favorite recipes. Your tried-and-true dishes will turn out fine, and as an added bonus, you'll reduce the fat grams and cholesterol.

Try soymilk on cereal. Whip it into your mashed potatoes. Make some hot chocolate. Or just drink a tall, cool glass all by itself.

Use Meat Alternatives

With more people embracing a healthy plant-based diet, it only makes sense that food-manufacturing companies would try to meet the demand by offering soy versions of meat. The quality, taste, and texture of these products are constantly improving. Some vegetarians dislike these meat alternative products because they taste too much like the real thing! Try sneaking a meat alternative into a favorite family recipe, and see if anyone notices.

Hamburger alternatives seem to be showing up on the menu everywhere you go these days. With a single fast-food burger sandwich weighing in at as much as 680 calories and 39 grams of fat, health-conscious diners are looking for a better choice. A typical soy burger patty contains fewer than 150 calories and about four grams of fat. It should be noted that soy burgers are different from veggie burgers (although both are delicious and healthy). While veggie burgers are made with nuts, grains, and vegetables, soy burgers are made with soy protein. Try one on a bun with ketchup, mustard, and all of your favorite veggie toppings.

Sneak some soy "beef" or "sausage" into any recipe calling for ground beef or sausage. Try it in tacos, burritos, lasagna, spaghetti, stuffing, and casseroles. Make a soy sloppy joe. Experiment with soy beef and sausage as pizza toppings. Form the sausage into patties for your weekend breakfasts, or make your own soy burgers.

Almost any other meat product you can think of can now be found in a soy version at your local health-food store. The products include hot dogs, bratwurst, sausage links, pepperoni, chorizo, lunchmeats, bacon and "chicken" patties, breasts, and nuggets. These products can be purchased in several sections of the grocery store. Look in the refrigerated and freezer sections, and don't forget to check the bulk bins for dry mixes and texturized vegetable protein (TVP). Up your soy protein intake and reduce your fat and calorie consumption by trying these healthy meat alternatives.

Try Tofu and Tempeh

You don't like tofu, you say? It's difficult to dislike tofu because it essentially has no flavor — that's the main attraction of it! Tofu picks up the flavor of whatever you cook it with, making it a vehicle for showcasing your favorite sauces. Try it in Asian stir-fries. Grill it. Firm tofu can be cubed and added to soups.

Silken tofu is even more versatile than firm tofu. Substitute pureed silken soft tofu for cream in creamed soups. You can easily sneak silken tofu into your family's dessert menu. Try substituting ¼ cup of silken firm tofu for one egg as a leavening agent when baking. Key lime pies, cheesecakes, cream pies, and mousses can all be transformed into healthier versions of their former selves with a little innovation and a healthy dose of soy.

If you don't enjoy cooking or baking, you can try ready-to-eat baked tofu. It comes in several flavors and is available at your local health food store.

Tempeh is an Indonesian diet staple made from whole, cooked soybeans that are cultured and fermented. Tempeh is a soy protein powerhouse: One-half cup provides 19.5 grams of protein. It has a nutty, chewy flavor. Try marinating and grilling tempeh, and add it to stir-fries, fajitas, salads, and chili.

Snack on Soy

Have you tried edamame, the soybean snack idea imported from Asia that's taking American snackers by storm? Edamame is a large-seeded soybean. The pods are boiled and salted, and they can be dipped in soy sauce for extra flavor. Pop the beans from the pod into your mouth — they're highly addictive! A one-half cup serving of edamame provides 11 grams of protein.

How about roasted soy nuts? These delectable goodies can be found in health food stores. They're crunchy and salty, and they just might become your favorite new snack. Or try a soy-protein nutrition bar instead of reaching for a candy bar. Use soynut butter instead of peanut butter. Try nondairy soy frozen desserts instead of ice cream.

Incorporate Flour Power

Soy flour is available in two varieties: full-fat and defatted. Full-fat soy flour contains almost 30 grams of protein per cup, and defatted contains a whopping 41 grams per cup. Because soy flour contains no gluten, it cannot be used to entirely replace wheat or rye flour in bread recipes. Try putting two tablespoons of soy flour in a measuring cup and filling the remainder with wheat flour. You will add moistness and a nutty flavor to your bread.

In baked products that are not raised with yeast, you can replace up to one-fourth of the flour with soy flour.

Soy flour can be used like all-purpose flour to thicken gravies and sauces. Use it in your favorite pancake recipe to replace up to one-third of the all-purpose flour.

Although soy foods may seem exotic at first, it's very easy to integrate them into your diet. Look for soy foods in your grocery store, and try purchasing one or two new products every time you shop. Start substituting soy products for ingredients in your family's menus (you don't even have to tell them if you don't want to). If you've never tried tofu or tempeh, now is a great time to do so. Asian cultures have been reaping the benefits of a diet rich in soy for centuries — it's time for the rest of the world to get in on the action.

~ Ruth Baranowski

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