

F-22

Setting the record straight: refuting the misinformation about soyfoods

*Mark Messina*, Nutrition Matters, Inc., Massachusetts, USA

Soyfoods have been intensely investigated over the past 30 years. There is substantial evidence suggesting that independent of nutrient contribution, soyfoods reduce the risk of several chronic diseases. However, despite the many nutritional and health benefits of soyfoods these foods are not without controversy as there is concern, primarily because they are such rich sources of isoflavones, that they may exert untoward effects in some individuals. Concerns include male feminization, worsening the prognosis of breast cancer patients, infertility, hypothyroidism, precocious puberty, gout, and impairment of mineral status. However, almost without exception, these concerns are based on animal data whereas the human data show soyfoods have an excellent safety profile. For example, although isoflavones are classified as phytoestrogens, clinical studies show that neither soyfoods nor isoflavones affect testosterone levels in men or sperm or semen parameters. Therefore, men should not fear consuming soyfoods. In fact, there is evidence that eating soyfoods reduces risk of developing prostate cancer. Similarly, although animal studies show that isoflavones may stimulate the growth of existing mammary tumors, clinical studies show soy does not adversely affect indicators of breast cancer risk and observational studies show consuming soy after a diagnosis of breast cancer reduces recurrence and mortality. Even soybean oil is maligned as there are claims in the scientific literature and the blogosphere that because it is high in omega-6 polyunsaturated fat (PUFA) that soybean oil increases inflammation. However, the clinical research shows soybean oil does not increase inflammation and the observational data show omega-6 PUFA reduces risk of coronary heart disease. The totality of the scientific data indicates that soyfoods can make an important contribution to healthy diets.