



The role of soyfoods

in a children's healthy balanced diet

Report of an Experts' round table discussion meeting

Key propositions:

- 📌 Soyfoods produced by natural processes using the whole soybean retain the full array of nutrients.
- 📌 Children can grow and develop healthily with soyfoods as part of a balanced diet
- 📌 A soyfood as part of a meal, snack or drink supplies energy, high quality protein and fat to help meet a child's everyday needs
- 📌 Soyfoods contain high quality protein which is an important nutritional 'building block' for proper growth
- 📌 Soyfoods contain essential fatty acids (including polyunsaturated omega 3 and 6 fatty acids) and therefore can add to the overall value of the total food intake
- 📌 Just one soyfood serving per day can make a difference

You can be as healthy as the food you eat

Any good cook will tell you that what really matters are the quality of your basic ingredients, tried and tested recipes and know-how. With regard to the soybean, thousands of years as an Asian family staple and many generations of **soyfood** consumption suggest this high quality food **deserves a larger place in the Western diet**.

Now scientists have stepped forward to make it clear that the soybean is a **valuable source of essential nutrients in the diet**. More precisely, whole soyfoods – that is, foods made from the whole bean – provide high quality protein, essential polyunsaturated fatty acids (omega 6 and 3), vitamins, minerals and fibre. The scientific view is that a child will flourish growing up on whole soyfood products as part of a healthy balanced diet. Scientists further agree that a regular intake of soyfoods can improve the chances of enjoying a healthy adulthood.

Right food at the right time

Soybean crops have fed generation after generation of families across the Asian continent. Traditional natural processes developed in homes over thousands of years exploit the exceptional versatility of the soybean to make foodstuffs as well as milk-like drinks suitable for cooking and drinking.

Nowadays tasty soy-based foods and drinks are widely available in Western countries.

The whole soybean contains fibre and many nutrients (**protein, essential polyunsaturated fat, vitamins and minerals**) that help meet dietary needs.

Increased scientific interest in the high food value of soy comes at a time when the health of the Western population - adults and children - is a matter for concern.

Equally important, and noted by scientists, is how soyfoods can be used in a modern Western diet, which often includes significant amounts of meat, dairy products and snacks with a high saturated fatty acid content.

Soyfoods in the diet can help to improve the fatty acid balance of the Western diet (more polyunsaturated fat and less saturated fat). Therefore, experts conclude that just **one daily serving of soyfoods can make an important contribution** to a healthy well-balanced diet by helping to meet nutrient requirements and promoting proper growth and development.

Early childhood is the best time to establish good eating habits and easily digestible soyfoods can be introduced from the age of one.

What is a healthy balanced diet for children?

A well-balanced daily menu needs to contain food items from each food group of the food guidelines to obtain the recommended intake of protein, carbohydrates, fibre, fats, vitamins and minerals.

This optimum combination of nutrients allows a child to grow physically and mentally strong, energetic and with natural defences against common ailments.



Act on the facts

Scientists, looking at the value of soyfoods in a children's healthy balanced diet, claim that a daily serving of **soy product can give a child an excellent start in life by virtue of its singular package of nutritional 'building blocks'**.

According to expert opinion, if this early-formed habit continues long after childhood, the benefits of soy in a balanced diet will be fully realised.

A child cannot make informed choices; adults can. So it is up to parents, carers and, where school meals are provided, school caterers, to deliver suitable options and a diverse selection of foods.

A child, exposed to diverse food flavour and texture experiences, is more likely to be open-minded and willing to try unfamiliar foods. This strategy can avoid mealtimes becoming a battleground.

Maintaining healthy blood cholesterol levels

Raised blood cholesterol is one of the major risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease.

Research has shown that consuming soya as part of a healthy diet can help in reducing blood cholesterol levels. In 2002, a group of leading scientists under the auspices of the JHCI (the UK's Joint Health Claims Initiative), approved a health claim for soy protein 'The inclusion of 25g of soya protein per day as part of a diet low in saturated fat can help reduce blood cholesterol levels.'

Studies in hyperlipidemic children have shown that a diet including soya can also be beneficial in these children and can help to postpone the need for introduction of medication. Moreover soya foods are low in saturated fat, rich in essential polyunsaturated fat and do not contain any cholesterol. Therefore it is interesting to start incorporating soyfoods in the diet from a very young age to obtain lifelong benefits.



In summary: Starting young. What does soy do for you?

Soybean is the basic ingredient in a large and growing variety of soyfoods. Derived from a natural plant product, soyfood efficiently supplies a nutrient boost that provides energy, ensures growth and delivers positive health gains.

Foods made from the whole soybean offer significant value in a children's balanced diet, agree scientists and nutrition experts.

Good eating habits taught early in life coupled with an active lifestyle during childhood, adolescence and beyond, can contribute to healthier adulthood. This is the consensus opinion of scientists based on the findings of worldwide scientific research and observation.

Recommended for children from one-year-old*, soyfoods are easily digestible, which is clearly an advantage for its youngest consumers.

Because most soyfoods are enriched with calcium, children whose daily diet includes soy options maintain their calcium intake levels.

* below the age of one, breast feeding or specific adapted infant formulas should be used

ENSA recommendations:

A little soy every day can offer life-long benefits

Soyfoods and drinks enjoyed **just once a day as part of a healthy diet**, with regular physical exercise, can have notable benefits, scientists believe.

Started from a young age, a sensible eating regime including soyfoods, can help to take a step towards maintaining health in later life.

Soyfoods will give a growing child all the **nutritional benefits and energy** the child needs.

Soyfoods make **ideal and healthy convenience foods** that are quick to prepare and offer excellent parent and child appeal.

Soyfoods are very adaptable making it easy to introduce the benefits of soy, naturally and in all kinds of ways, to a child's daily diet.

Calcium-enriched soyfoods are interchangeable in recipes for cheese, milk and cream. Moreover different soyfoods are on the market as alternatives for meat. Fruit-flavoured soy yoghurts and creamy desserts appeal to a child's taste buds.

Soy drink scores high for **easily digestible high quality protein containing all essential amino acids** and 'good' fats.

Different foods can be gradually introduced as a natural extension to a child's varied diet.

- For breakfast, serve soydrink in a cup or poured over cereal
- For snacks and packed lunches, soy is portable as yoghurt or drink for kindergarten, nursery and school
- Try tofu in a quick stir fry, nuggets, burgers or other favourite recipe in place of meat or cheese
- Anytime, yofu in shakes, cakes, pancakes
- Naturally processed and pre-packed, soyfood is a versatile ingredient for meal making and convenient for picnics and on the move
- Where to look? In the dairy cabinet among the plain and fortified and flavoured milks, yoghurts, dairy desserts and cream; find tofu on chilled shelves; other soyfoods will be in the freezer

Interested? Have a look on www.ensa-eu.org for more details and references or contact us via secretariat@ensa-eu.org

