



# Compassionate

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## SOY AND PROSTATE CANCER

I suspect that almost 100% of prostate cancer "experts," as well as most laypersons with prostate cancer, are convinced that soy is beneficial in helping to treat, control and/or prevent prostate cancer.

To the best of my knowledge, I have been the only one voicing a contrarian position regarding the effects of soy on prostate cancer. I have consistently voiced this contrarian opinion regarding the relationship of soy and prostate cancer since the mid-1990's.

We know that Dr. Snuffy Myers has been one of the most vocal supporters of soy over the past many years, and for the ten years beginning in the mid-1990's, Drs. Steve Strum and Mark Scholz have been equally ardent supporters of soy. In fact, Dr. Strum did studies utilizing genistein and, at times, other soy products.

My views regarding soy and its effect on prostate cancer were very simple. As I pointed out in my vitamin paper, when a patient finished triple hormone blockade®, and I observed that their PSA was going up too rapidly or had risen too high, I would ask them to discontinue all over-the-counter products, and repeat their PSA two weeks later. If the PSA came down, then the most likely etiology was that something in their over-the-counter (OTC) products was adversely effecting the PSA. These patients were advised to avoid taking those products. This is simple logic and made sense to me and to most patients. Using this simple approach, I did not have to understand complex chemical formulas or molecular biology trying to determine how various compounds affect cell membrane receptors; or the cytoplasm in cells; or interact with the nucleus or nuclear receptors. Forget the difficult explanations; if your PSA rose, stop taking the OTC products that you were taking when your PSA rose!! This is what I have been advising my patients to do since about 1993.

I have also pointed out that soy products are a form of phytoestrogen and they lower testosterone levels. One of the papers I wrote on testosterone, probably ten years ago, was titled "Testosterone and Prostate Cancer; The Higher, The Better." For prostate cancer patients, if you are not on hormone blockade, I remain convinced that higher levels of testosterone are much preferable for you than lower levels.

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My position regarding soy and prostate cancer is somewhat vindicated and/or reinforced as reported in the September 19, 2007 issue of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, Volume 99, Number 18, pages 1,364-1,365. This article describes the history of soy and possible prostate cancer interactions. In 1985, a doctor at the University of Helsinki discovered high levels of estrogen-like soy compounds in the urine of Japanese men. Because Japanese men had low rates of prostate cancer, he **hypothesized** that high soy consumption protected men against prostate cancer. However, more than two decades later, the article states, "Scientists are still trying to confirm the idea."

In the March 2007 edition of *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers, and Prevention* is a report on a large prospective study from Japan. This report rather than clarifying the issue paints a rather interesting, complicated picture. High soy consumption appeared to protect against early prostate cancer; however, high soy consumption was associated with an **increased risk** of advanced prostate cancer in some men. The authors pointed out that they can't recommend supplements with isoflavones because their relationship to advanced prostate cancer is "unclear."

The *JNCI* article also points out that earlier studies in Japan reached contradictory conclusions regarding the protective effect of soy.

In 2005, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality issued a report that examined 178 prospective studies of soy foods, and concluded that the evidence supporting a protective benefit against cancer was "limited." This was reported in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, 2005, Volume 97, page 1,494.

The most recent study from Japan pointed out that the protective effect of isoflavone-rich foods was strongest in men age 60 and older, and the authors felt that isoflavones may be protective for localized prostate cancer only in men aged more than 60 years, and may not have a protective effect in the early stage of prostate cancer in younger men. They also postulated that there might not be any real association between soy and prostate cancer at all. This study also showed that there is an association between high soy consumption and advanced prostate cancer. Men who ate two or more bowls of miso soup per day had roughly twice the risk of developing advanced prostate cancer as did men who had less than one bowl per day.

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Thus, I conclude that the relationship between soy and prostate cancer is confusing at best; that this largest study to date involving 43,000 Japanese men shows that men who had higher intakes of soy had twice the risk for developing advanced prostate cancer as did men with less soy consumption. I would also point out that many prior studies in breast cancer had also identified increased soy intake as being associated with increased risk of developing breast cancer. For more than ten years, I have advised women with breast cancer to avoid significant intake of soy products.

As of Halloween, 2007, my soy recommendations remain unchanged; I do not believe men with prostate cancer should be encouraged to use soy products. Additionally, since soy products are known to lower testosterone levels, I believe it is dangerous for men with prostate cancer to go out of their way to consume soy products.

In conclusion, why increase your intake of soy when it, at least in some studies, has been found to be associated with an increased risk of developing advanced prostate cancer? In addition, it is an established fact that soy and phytoestrogen products lower testosterone. Most men who are not on hormone blockade usually try to avoid things that lower testosterone levels.

On a personal note, I feel substantially vindicated by this recent article since I have felt that I was the only voice trying to stand up to the avalanche of experts who enthusiastically endorsed the use of soy/phytoestrogen products for patients with prostate cancer.

As always -

Be happy,

Be well,

Live long and prosper,

DR. BOB

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