



Soy's Role in Pediatric Nutrition

**Healthcare professionals and parents agree:
Soy is a healthy choice for kids.**

The nutrients found in soy lay a foundation for growth and lifelong health. Soy foods provide high-quality protein along with fiber, essential fats, and other key vitamins and minerals that help support growth and development during childhood and adolescence. Together, these nutrients help build a strong foundation for growing bodies by supporting muscle and bone development and digestive health while addressing energy needs and promoting overall wellness.

Protein

Protein is essential for building and maintaining strong muscles and bones. Soy foods and beverages are one of the few plant-based sources of complete protein, providing essential amino acids in appropriate proportions to fuel growth. Soy foods help support healthy cholesterol levels and are typically lower saturated fat content than many other common protein sources.¹

Fiber

Fiber is a key building block for digestive health. Most children and adults fall short of recommended fiber intakes, but soy foods such as edamame, tempeh, and soy nuts provide fiber that helps support regularity, ease constipation—a common concern among children—and build satisfying, nutritious meals.²

Isoflavones

Consuming soy early in life may be particularly beneficial. Evidence suggests that the isoflavones in soy foods may reduce adult breast cancer risk. Furthermore, because childhood dietary habits track into adulthood, eating soy when young increases the likelihood of adult soy consumption, and therefore potentially reaping the many proposed benefits associated with eating soy later in life, including reducing risk of cognitive decline and improving cardiovascular health.³

Soy Infant Formula

The development of Soy Infant Formula (SIF) grew out of the need for a nonmilk-based formula alternative for infants who had an allergy or intolerance to cow’s milk formula or whose parents eschewed cow’s milk formula for ethical or religious reasons. SIF has been used for more than a century, but its popularity increased dramatically beginning in the 1960s. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, SIF promotes normal growth and development.⁷

In addition to soy protein, SIF also contains plant oils and oils high in linoleic acid (e.g., soybean oil). This combination of oils is used to provide essential fatty acids and to mimic the fatty acid composition of human milk.

Soy and Hormones

Soy foods are uniquely rich sources of naturally occurring plant compounds known as isoflavones. Isoflavones are commonly classified as phytoestrogens or plant estrogens, but they differ in multiple ways from the hormone estrogen. They do not affect hormone levels in men or women and in fact, researchers from the University of Toronto recently showed that in postmenopausal women, they had no effect on any of the outcomes affected by the hormone estrogen. Furthermore, after an extensive review of the scientific literature, a team of researchers concluded that soy does not affect puberty onset in boys or girls. People in Japan have consumed soy foods for centuries. Soy is often one of the first solid foods to be consumed.⁸

Lifelong Nutrition & Prevention

Research continues to support that good nutrition earlier in life can play an important role in long-term health. The protein and other nutrients found in soy foods support growth and development during childhood and adolescence. The science also suggests that eating soy foods earlier in life may offer protective benefits later on. A recent study found that women who consumed more soy foods during childhood and teen years reduced risk factors associated with breast cancer.⁸

Soy By The Numbers⁴⁻⁶

 Edamame (1/2 cup) Protein: 10g Fiber: 6g Isoflavones: 35mg	 Soy milk (1 cup) Protein: 8g Fiber: 0g Isoflavones: 29mg	 Roasted Soynuts (1/4 cup- 28g) Protein: 10g Fiber: 5g Isoflavones: 42mg	 Tempeh (3oz) Protein: 17g Fiber: ~7g Isoflavones: 30mg	 Firm Tofu (3oz) Protein: 8g Fiber: 1g Isoflavones: 28mg	 Soy Nut Butter (2 Tbsp- 32g) Protein: 7g Fiber: 3g Isoflavones: 0.18mg
 Soy Yogurt (6 oz) Protein: 8g Fiber: 2g Isoflavones: 56mg	 Soy-Based Burger (1 patty- 100g) Protein: 16g Fiber: 5g Isoflavones: 6mg	 Soy Crumbles (1/3 cup) Protein: 8g Fiber: 2g Isoflavones: 4mg	 Soy-Based Nutrition Bar Protein: 17g Fiber: 4g Isoflavones: 9mg	 Soy Protein Powder (1 Scoop) Protein: 20g Fiber: 0.33g Isoflavones: 33mg	

*Amounts may vary depending on product type and brand.

A Note About Allergies

Although more children than adults are initially allergic to soy, about 70% of children outgrow their soy allergy by age 10 years; about 3 out of every 1,000 adults in North America are allergic to soy. Soy-allergic individuals need to avoid soy foods but can safely consume highly refined soybean oil.

Of the Big 9 allergens in the United States, soy is one of the least prevalent, second only to sesame. For those who are unable to eat dairy or peanuts, soy can be a great alternative. Soynut butter offers a peanut butter replacement, and soymilk is the only plant-based milk that is comparable nutritionally with cow’s milk.⁹

1. <https://sniglobal.org/soy-protein/>
2. https://sniglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Childrens_Soy-and-Nutrition-Guide.pdf
3. <https://sniglobal.org/soy-isoflavones/>
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service. 2015. USDA Database for the Isoflavone Content of Selected Foods, Release 2.1. Nutrient Data Laboratory Home Page: <http://www.ars.usda.gov/nutrientdata/isoflav>
5. Messina M. Soy and Health Update: Evaluation of the Clinical and Epidemiologic Literature. *Nutrients*. 2016 Nov 24;8(12):754. doi: 10.3390/nu8120754. PMID: 27886135; PMCID: PMC5188409.
6. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center. FoodData Central. [Internet]. [cited Dec. 10, 2025]. Available from <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/>.
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8. Ho SC, Boyd NF, Tam WWS, Yeo W, Chu WCW, So EKF, Yu R, Woo J. Lifetime Soy Intake and Adult Mammographic Density in Chinese Premenopausal Women. *Nutrients*. 2026; 18(7):1116. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu18071116>
9. FAO and WHO. 2022. Risk Assessment of Food Allergens. Part 1 – Review and validation of Codex Alimentarius priority allergen list through risk assessment. Meeting Report. Food Safety and Quality Series No. 14. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9070en>

Serving Soy

Parents make decisions about their child's nutrition by balancing taste, affordability, and nutritional value. Soy can be an optimal choice. Eighty percent of parents are open to introducing their child to new soy foods or beverages, and introducing soy foods early in life can help children build a familiarity with a variety of flavors, textures, and nutritious foods and support adventurous eating habits.¹⁰

10. Soy Nutrition Institute Global. Pediatric Health Care Providers and Parents of Young Children Soy Research. Presentation slides. Unpublished.

Start the Day

- Cereal or oatmeal topped with soymilk and berries.
- Soy-based yogurt with granola and fruit.
- Smoothie blended with silken tofu or soymilk.

Pack A Lunch

- Blend edamame into a dip and serve with crackers or vegetables.
- Pair soynut butter with jelly for a twist on a childhood classic.
- Marinate tempeh in a favorite sauce and serve in a wrap with fresh vegetables.

Dinner Time

- Add soy crumbles or crumbled tempeh to your favorite ground beef recipes.
- Add silken tofu to mashed potatoes for added creaminess and protein.
- Crisp up tofu nuggets in the air fryer and serve with dipping sauces.
- Use soybean oil to roast vegetables or potatoes, or in marinades, salad dressings, and sauces.
- Cook frozen edamame in pods and sprinkle with salt.

Snack Hacks

- Add soynuts to homemade trail mixes.
- Melt chocolate in soymilk for a rich hot chocolate or enjoy a cup of chilled chocolate soymilk.
- Create a sweet dip by blending silken tofu, honey, and cinnamon, and serve with fruit.
- Grab a snack bag of roasted edamame or a soy-based protein bar.



Find more ways to
cook and serve soy at
[SoyConnection.com](https://www.SoyConnection.com).



For more information about soy foods
and soybean oil across the lifespan,
visit [SNIGlobal.org](https://www.SNIGlobal.org).