

Is there any concern over the use of soy and photoestrogens?

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There is a great deal of information and misinformation on the Internet related to the phytoestrogens or isoflavones in soy, especially foods containing soy in an infant's or child's diet. Research has shown that soy continues to be a beneficial option for children with certain intolerances such as cow's milk sensitivities and for families who prefer a vegetarian lifestyle. This is because soy offers complete proteins to help meet a child's overall protein needs.

In 2006, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, US National Institute of Health, and the Center for the Evaluation of Risk to Human Reproduction (CERHR) of the National Toxicology Program convened a meeting of key pediatric nutrition and medical experts to review the use of soy formulas in infancy and addressed many of the concerns about soy and phytoestrogens. This prestigious group was unable to conclude, after exhaustive research and reviews of the medical and scientific literature, that soy products, including soy infant formulas, were unsafe or presented risk to reproductive and developmental health. The panel called for continued research on the role of soy in human health.¹

Since that time, CERHR has determined that there were new publications related to human exposure or reproductive and/or developmental toxicity that had been published since the 2006 evaluation. CERHR held a meeting in December of 2009 to review these new data and issued its final report in 2010 reconfirming that "there is minimal concern for adverse effects on development in infants who consume soy formula."²

Furthermore, a clinical report co-authored by the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Nutrition and titled, "Use of soy protein-based formulas in infant feeding," states the following: "In summary, although studied by numerous investigators in various species, there is no conclusive evidence from animal, adult human, or infant populations that dietary soy isoflavones may adversely affect human development, reproduction, or endocrine function."³

Also, a study from the Arkansas Children's Nutrition Center compared growth, development and health of breast-fed children with children fed soy formula or milk-based formula. Preliminary results indicate the feeding of soy formula to infants supports normal growth and development. The authors further state "early exposure to soy foods, including SF (soy formula), actually may provide health benefits rather than adverse effects, e.g., improved body and bone composition and prevention of breast cancer."⁴ This Center continues to study use of soy in infancy and has published additional reports showing no effect on reproduction.⁵

1. <http://cerhr.niehs.nih.gov>

2. National Toxicology Program. "Final CERHR Expert Panel Report on Soy Infant Formula." Washington, DC: National Toxicology Program Center for the Evaluation of Risks to Human Reproduction, National Institutes of Health, US Department of Health and Human Services, January, 2010.

3. Jatinder Bhatia, Frank Greer, and the Committee on Nutrition. "Use of soy protein-based formulas in infant feeding," *Pediatrics* 2008; 121; 1062-1068.

4. Badger, TM, et al, "The health implications of soy infant formula," *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 2009; 89(suppl):1668S-1672S.

5. Gilchrist, JM, et al, "Ultrasonographic Patterns of Reproductive Organs in Infants Fed Soy Formula: Comparisons to Infants Fed Breast Milk and Milk Formula," *Journal of Pediatrics*. 156(2):215-220, February 2010.