

NATURAL HEALTH

THERAPIES | BEAUTY | WELLNESS | MEDITATION | ESCAPES

Feel great today!

Patsy Kensit

"We need to stop saying sorry"

- EMBRACE YOUR AGE
- BOOST ENERGY
- BEAT INFLAMMATION, NATURALLY

TOP WELLNESS ADVICE

RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS?

Why communication is always key

SEASONAL SKINCARE

Top 10 natural beauty buys

WARDROBE HEROES

How to repeat your look and not get bored

Self-help therapies explained

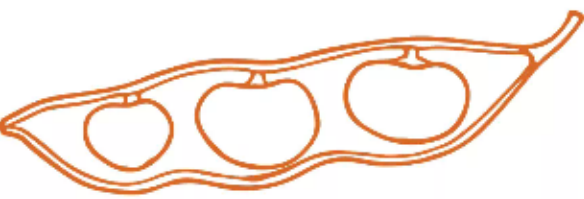
+ HOW THEY'VE CHANGED REAL LIVES

EMBRACE *all* your EMOTIONS

(yes, even the difficult ones!)



Inside: JO FAIRLEY'S FAVOURITE EYE CREAMS ● SIMPLE WAYS TO RELAX & UNWIND ● DELICIOUS GLUTEN-FREE MEALS YOU'LL LOVE ● HAVE YOU TRIED A SEAWEED BATH?



From salty fried tempeh slices enjoyed in the southern tip of Indonesia to fermented kinema in the northern reaches of Nepal, soy beans have been at the heart of life in Asia for centuries. But as more of us switch to plant-centric diets that lean heavily on this legume, what should we know about the implications for our health, and our planet?

How do you eat yours?

Soy (or soya, as it's interchangeably labelled) could be the most versatile bean our planet grows; those bright green legumes in the frozen aisle or their beige dried form in the whole food section are just the tip of the iceberg. Soy beans are most often broken down into their constituent parts, for example soy oil (around 20 percent of the whole bean) is squeezed out for use in everything from cooking to candles and paint to insect repellent. The rest of the bean is roughly equal parts protein and carbohydrate (including the insoluble type we call fibre) and various forms appear everywhere from animal feed or baking ingredients to ready meals or cereal bars. Despite the explosion in soy-based milks, yoghurt, ice-cream, and meat alternatives, you might most consciously consume soya in the form of tofu. Made in a similar way to dairy cheese, tofu is formed by coagulating soy milk into thick curds that are drained and pressed to make soft blocks. Mainstream brands are split between those with nigari, a natural seawater derivative also known as magnesium chloride, and those using a mineral called gypsum (calcium sulphate) or calcium chloride, an additive widely used to preserve foods. The latter can be higher in fibre, potassium and, unsurprisingly, calcium. Silken tofu, a soft-set version that's sometimes used in desserts still qualifies for the claim 'high in protein' but has around half as much as firm tofu where the soy curds are more densely packed. You'll also have encountered edamame (young and tender soy beans that pack multiple vitamins alongside protein and fibre) and miso (the umami-rich paste made from fermented beans). Fermentation also produces soy sauce and tempeh, made by cooking and fermenting soy beans before pressing them into sliceable patties. Tempeh is considered a real nutritional powerhouse: relatively unprocessed but easily digestible thanks to microbial action that breaks down the legumes' oligosaccharides and phytic acid.



How safe is it?

"Soy tends to be a significant player in most plant-based diets but has had mixed reviews over the years," says Dr Nauf AlBendar, women's health specialist and founder of The Womb Effect (thewombeffect.co). "Recent studies have seen soy positively impacting the severity of menopause symptoms, benefiting cardiovascular health, improving fertility, and protecting against hormonal cancers such as breast cancer." However, as Dr Nauf points out, doubts around soy have persisted, with fears around its impact on hormonal balance linking it with benign fibroid tumours or endometriosis, and even breast and ovarian cancer. "Part of the uncertainty is due to the complexity of soy's effects on the body," says Dr Nauf. "Soy is

unique since it contains a high concentration of isoflavones, a plant oestrogen (phytoestrogen) type that can mimic human oestrogen but with much weaker effects. Since higher oestrogen levels are associated with a higher risk of hormonal cancers, many women fear consuming phytoestrogen will increase their risk of developing the disease. But women have two oestrogen receptors, alpha and beta. Isoflavones preferentially bind to the beta oestrogen receptor and not the alpha receptors, which cause cells to grow. This may partly explain why women in Asia, who eat a lot of soy-based foods, have only one-fifth the rate of breast cancer that occurs among Western women." The cancer risk really has been debunked. "Foods made from soybeans like soy milk, tofu



"Recent studies have seen soy positively impacting the severity of menopause symptoms, benefiting cardiovascular health, improving fertility, and protecting against hormonal cancers such as breast cancer."



How eco-friendly is it?

Global soy harvests have grown eight-fold in the last 50 years, and in major producing countries like Brazil precious forest and grasslands have been converted into farmland. Besides the loss of precious habitat and biodiversity, this process, and the harvesting and transport of soy from remote regions to global markets, generates significant CO2 emissions. But this doesn't mean your tofu ramen is bad for the planet. "The use of soy in food is completely overshadowed by its use in animal feed," says Clare Oxborrow, senior sustainability analyst at Friends of the Earth (friendsoftheearth.uk). "Globally, around 77 percent of all soy produced is used for animal feed, with just seven percent used directly in products like tofu or as soya beans, so cutting down on meat and dairy is the biggest way people can reduce the contribution of their food to global deforestation and the emissions driving the climate crisis. Where soy is used directly in meat alternatives, companies often have more robust sourcing policies than those that relate to animal feed, but the only way to be sure is to question the companies directly on their sourcing policies. Generally, where a big meat company has branched into alternative proteins, the policies will be weaker than those of smaller, more ethical companies."

and miso can be enjoyed as part of a healthy balanced diet, including if you have been diagnosed with cancer," concludes Fiona Osgun, senior health information manager at Cancer Research UK.

How nutritious is it?

Soy beans contain fibre and anti-inflammatory polyphenols but the star attraction is protein; the legume contains all of the nine amino acids our bodies need, making it one of a handful of plant sources of complete protein. "Soy-based foods have around 75 percent of the biological value of animal proteins such as dairy and eggs," says dietitian Sophie Medlin, founder of City Dietitians (citydietitians.co.uk), "which is very good compared to other plant-based proteins. Effectively, that means if the soy mince packet says 15g of

protein per 100g, you'd need to eat 125g to get 15g of useable protein into your body." The good news is the exploding interest in vegan diets makes healthy forms of soy – the beans, tofu and tempeh – more widely available. The bad news is you'll find soya cropping up in all kinds of ultra-processed foods, so it's essential to check labels to understand what you're buying. "Soy products can be highly processed so it's important to factor that in if you're eating them regularly," warns Sophie. "Regardless of what they're made from, highly processed foods should never be a staple part of our daily diet." Dr Nauf agrees. "It's best to concentrate on whole food organic versions of soy such as edamame and tofu or, even better, fermented soy such as tempeh, miso paste, and tamari."

In a nutshell

So there you have it; not all soy products are created equal, but increasing this versatile legume's role in your lifestyle could bring some big benefits for you and our planet. Switching to sustainable soy yoghurt in your bircher muesli or a sugar-free soy milk in your tea could be no-brainers, but there are bigger gains to be had from a rethink of all your meals. Swapping marinated tempeh strips into your stir fries, replacing your usual stock cubes with a dollop of unpasteurised miso paste, or using sustainable tofu as the protein in your weekday dinners could be a real game-changer.

