

SoyConnection

By U.S. Soy

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What's Trending in Evidence-Based Nutrition for 2026



BEYOND PROCESSING: What the Latest Research Reveals About UPFs and Health Outcomes

By Mark Messina, PhD, MS

Counseling Tips:

- 1. Not all processed foods are alike:** Foods like flavored yogurt, plant-based meat alternatives, candy, and chips can all fall within the same processing categorization according to some definitions, yet these foods vary in nutrient content and differentially affect health outcomes.
- 2. Look at the nutrients:** Foods high in sugar and salt are linked to weight gain and health risks. Prioritize nutrient-dense options like soymilk or soy-based meat alternatives.
- 3. Pace and produce:** A slower pace of eating and foods lower in calories (but higher in nutrients) per bite (like fruits, veggies, beans) help prevent overeating.
- 4. Focus on overall balance:** You can enjoy some processed foods while prioritizing minimally processed, nutrient-dense foods for long-term health.



PLANT-BASED MEAT ALTERNATIVES PROVIDE A PRACTICAL, NUTRITIONALLY SOUND WAY TO BOOST PLANT PROTEIN INTAKE

By Virginia Messina, MPH, RD

Counseling Tips:

- 1. Balance your protein sources:** Try to include more plant-based proteins like beans, lentils, soy, and plant-based meat alternatives (PBMA) to complement animal protein.
- 2. Choose nutrient-rich options:** Legumes and PBMA provide protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals—key nutrients for overall health.
- 3. Don't worry too much about "processed" labels:** A food's healthfulness is best measured by its nutrient content and its effects on health – not by its processing level. Soy foods like tofu, soymilk, and soy-based burgers can provide important nutrients like fiber, protein, potassium, and calcium, regardless of their level of processing.
- 4. Check nutrition labels:** The amount of protein, sodium, and added nutrients vary in PBMA—look for options with a good balance of nutrients.
- 5. Start small and be consistent:** Eating 4–5 servings of PBMA per week can help balance plant and animal protein in your diet in a practical, sustainable way.



CAN PATIENTS WITH CELIAC DISEASE SAFELY CONSUME SOY? WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS

By Mark Messina, PhD, MS

Counseling Tips:

- 1. Soy itself is naturally gluten-free:** Patients with celiac disease can safely consume soy foods, as long as there is no cross-contact with gluten.
- 2. Check labels carefully:** Some soy sauces and processed soy products may contain gluten—those with celiac disease should choose products labeled or certified as “gluten-free.”
- 3. Cross-contact is possible:** Soy can be exposed to wheat during growing, harvesting, or processing, so vigilance is important.
- 4. Individual tolerance varies:** Some people with celiac disease may react to soy due to sensitivity or soy allergy—introduce new soy foods gradually.
- 5. Work with your healthcare team:** If you have concerns or symptoms after eating soy, discuss safe options and testing with your dietitian or physician.

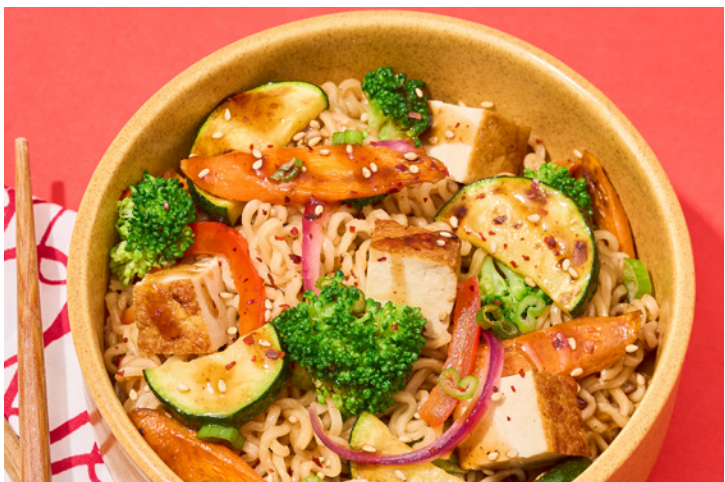


RETHINKING THE OMEGA-6 TO OMEGA-3 RATIO: Balance vs. Adequacy

By Mark Messina, PhD, MS

Counseling Tips:

- 1. Don't stress over the omega-6 to omega-3 ratio:** The ratio isn't a reliable measure of diet quality—focus instead on getting enough of both essential fats.
- 2. Eat sources of omega-3 EPA and DHA directly for best benefits:** Consuming eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) from fatty fish (like salmon or mackerel) or algal-based supplements is more effective than relying on your body to convert plant-based omega-3s.
- 3. Plant-based omega-3s help, but conversion is limited:** Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) from flax, chia, or walnuts can increase EPA slightly, but contributes little to DHA.
- 4. Omega-6 fats may offer health benefits:** Linoleic acid (LA), the main omega-6, may support heart health, and moderate consumption doesn't cause inflammation.
- 5. Focus on overall good fats:** Include a mix of nuts, seeds, fatty fish, and plant-based oils (such as soybean or olive) for heart and brain health rather than worrying about precise ratios.



U.S. HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SURVEY REVEALS SURPRISING PROTEIN PREFERENCES AND PERCEPTIONS

By Mark Messina, PhD, MS

Counseling Tips:

- 1. Seek high quality protein:** Soy, fish, beef, poultry, pork, eggs, and dairy all provide complete, high-quality protein containing all nine essential amino acids the body must obtain from food and beverages.
- 2. Plant-based protein powders are also effective:** Both soy and pea protein offer high-quality protein, though soy scores slightly higher for amino acid quality.
- 3. Plant-based meat alternatives are nutritious:** Even though some are considered processed, they can still be a convenient and healthy way to increase plant protein intake.
- 4. Evidence matters more than perception:** Research shows that moderate consumption of soy foods, including soy-based meat and dairy alternatives, is safe and supports health.
- 5. Talk openly about protein choices:** Health professionals can help address common concerns and questions about protein with evidence-based guidance.



SOY CONSUMPTION TRENDS IN JAPAN: Implications for Interpreting Health Outcomes and Setting Intake Recommendations

By Mark Messina, PhD, MS

Counseling Tips:

- 1. Soy has been part of healthy diets for centuries:** People in countries like Japan and China have eaten soy foods such as tofu, miso, and soymilk for generations. Research shows women in Asian countries who eat soy regularly tend to have lower rates of breast cancer than those who rarely do.
- 2. Traditional diets can offer helpful guidance:** The amount of soy eaten by Asian populations provides scientists with clues about healthy intake levels. However, dietary recommendations should be based primarily on scientific research.
- 3. Moderate soy intake fits into a healthy diet:** For most people, 1–2 servings of soy foods daily—like tofu, edamame, or soymilk—can be a safe and nutritious choice that supports heart and overall health.
- 4. Everyone’s response to soy can differ:** Genetics, overall diet, and lifestyle can all influence how soy affects your body.