

Soy Hypocritical

By ACSH Staff — August 3, 2008

This piece *originally appeared in the* [\[1\] Washington Times](#) ^[1].

Soy reduces sperm count! Or at least, that's what all the papers would be saying today if soy were an industrial chemical (like one of the three phthalates just banned by Congress).

A study published in the journal *Human Reproduction*, found that eating a half serving a day of soy-rich foods such as tofu, tempeh, and soy milk could be enough to significantly lower a man's sperm count.

Reports by Reuters and others on the study emphasized scientists' cautions that while studies in animals have linked high consumption of isoflavones (soy-derived estrogens) with infertility, so far there has been little evidence of their effect in humans. That's true -- but the same could be said for virtually every chemical scare that makes headlines, based as they are upon high-dose rodent studies with little relevance to ordinary-dose human exposures.

Reporters, politicians, and regulators automatically fall in line to condemn the latest purported threat (as gauged solely by rodent tests) from industry, but when the "threat" is just as "real" -- yet comes from nature -- society moves quietly onward, unperturbed. Nature, apparently, can do no wrong.

This study makes headway in that it examines the effect of soy-based foods in humans (and follows earlier reports that soy was linked to heart disease -- at least in mice -- and that the estrogen-like effects in soy may be harmful for women with breast cancer). According to the new study's principle investigator, Dr. Jorge Chavarro of the Harvard School of Public Health, "[The study] suggests soy foods could have some deleterious effect on the reproductive system and especially on sperm production," though he admits that doesn't necessarily mean soy could induce infertility.

If the precautionary principle (by which environmentalists decree that no substance should be used if it shows even the slightest potential for harm) and hypercautious EPA anti-chemical regulations were applied to nature as readily as to manmade products, we would have to ban half the molecules on the planet.

Not only environmental activists, but most people who shop at Whole Foods Markets or similar stores, believe that non-organic products could be harmful -- and that until there's absolute proof to the contrary, they think "better to be safe than sorry" and avoid mainstream food. To be intellectually consistent -- however foolish -- these shoppers and the organic stores themselves would have to pull soy products off the market until we have 100% proof that soy intake does not have a detrimental effect on human health.

Phthalates, soy, BPA -- why treat these "offending products" differently based only on their source? Congress is currently considering legislation to ban phthalates, and activist groups such as Greenpeace are up in arms calling for a ban, citing the same type of evidence that is now incriminating soy products. Why, then, has there been no outrage against this natural product? If rubber duckies across the country are being thrown in the trash, shouldn't tofu be tossed in right behind them?

But nature is in, industry is out, and soy will no doubt get a free ride from the people who usually serve as scaremongers. So while it would be very amusing, don't expect to see tofu-free vegetarian restaurants anytime soon.

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