Dear Alice,

I once read an article stating the soy products (especially soy milk) can lead to impotence within males if taken to a high degree. I go through random bouts in my life where I cut out cow milk completely and drink just soy milk for long periods of time (not because I'm lactose intolerant but for argued health benefits). I'm just wondering whether drinking strictly soy milk every day (at least 3 10-oz. glasses for me) is overkill.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Soy products have become a staple of the mainstream American diet with good reason. Studies have shown that cultures whose diets are high in soy, like Japan, Korea, and China, have a significantly lower risk of heart disease, the number one cause of death for both men and women in the U.S. There has been some debate in the media about the pros and cons of soy for men, but scientists and nutritionists say that there is no danger of impotence for men who consume soy products. On the contrary, soy appears to offer men protection against common male health problems like prostate cancer and high cholesterol.

Some of the confusion about soymilk and impotence may be due to the fact that soy is a rich source of isoflavones (also known as phytoestrogens), which mimic the effects of the hormone estrogen. Most people associate estrogen with women, but in reality both women and men naturally produce estrogen. Although the mechanism is still unclear, it appears that phytoestrogens may help regulate levels of estrogen in the body, acting as estrogen if levels are too low, and as anti-estrogen if levels are too high. It is possible that this is why a high-phytoestrogen diet does not affect hormone levels in men.

The bottom line though is: there has been no demonstrated link between soy consumption and impotence. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends eating 25 grams of soy protein daily, in the form of soy foods rather than supplements. This is the amount found in 1 cup of fresh soybeans, 1/3 cup of soy nuts, 3-1/2 cups of soy milk, or two soy burgers. Experts believe it is impossible to "overdose" on isoflavones by eating soy foods. Some warn against soy supplements, as it is difficult to be certain of the exact dosage and contents.
So keep enjoying your soy milk! Just make sure you wipe off the milk moustache afterward.

Alice!
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