

The Soy Health Claim

In October 1999, FDA approved a health claim that can be used on labels of soy-based foods to tout their heart-healthy benefits. The agency reviewed research from 27 studies that showed soy protein's value in lowering levels of total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein (LDL, or "bad" cholesterol).

Scientists agree that foods rich in soy protein can have considerable value to heart health, a fact backed by dozens of controlled clinical studies. A yearlong review of the available human studies in 1999 prompted FDA to allow a health claim on food labels stating that a daily diet containing 25 grams of soy protein, also low in saturated fat and cholesterol, may reduce the risk of heart disease.

"Soy by itself is not a magic food," says Christine Lewis, acting director of the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition's Office of Nutritional Products, Labeling and Dietary Supplements. "But rather it is an example of the different kinds of foods that together in a complete diet can have a positive effect on health."

Food marketers can now use the following claim, or a reasonable variation, on their products: "Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol that include 25 grams of soy protein a day may reduce the risk of heart disease. One serving of (name of food) provides ___ grams of soy protein." To qualify for the claim foods must contain per serving:

- 6.25 grams of soy protein
- low fat (less than 3 grams)
- low saturated fat (less than 1 gram)
- low cholesterol (less than 20 milligrams)
- sodium value of less than 480 milligrams for individual foods, less than 720 milligrams if considered a main dish, and less than 960 milligrams if considered a meal.

Foods made with the whole soybean, such as tofu, may qualify for the claim if they have no fat other than that naturally present in the whole bean.