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BY MEGHANEN DUTTA LINGAM

SO YOUR hormones are really bothering you. In fact you are scared to look in the mirror lest you find another zit on your already pimple smeared forehead. Your erratic moods that make you a part of the PMS brigade are really trying. Or maybe you are over 40 and struggling with hot flushes and sleepless nights. What if we told you there is actually a superfood that can solve these obnoxious hormonal issues and even more. Yes, it true that soya is a wonderfood

An explosion in soya research in the past few years has led to claims that its benefits range from reducing heart disease risk to boosting brain power. This legume's power appears to be limitless, from boosting bone strength and tackling obesity to lowering cholesterol and slaying cancer cells.

WAREHOUSE OF NUTRITION

Considered in texture and feel almost like chicken, soya is regarded as a vegetarian's meat. While it doesn't match up in taste to this humble bird, it definitely competes with it nutritionally. "Nutritionally, it's hard to beat. It has maximum protein in the vegetable food group," says Sunita, senior dietician, Rockland hospital. It is the only plant food which can compete with high protein non-vegetarian food like eggs, meat and fish.

Soya is reputed to have high quality protein. For instance, if 100 gm of soya is consumed, a certain portion of protein is lost during the process of absorption, digestion and metabolism, while 60 - 70 percent is utilised by the body, which is considered very high. "Other kinds of protein food can only lead to a maximum 40 - 50 per cent of utilisation of protein by the body," adds Sunita.

If this wasn't enough, dieticians vouch for soya flour in contrast to wheat flour pointing out that the former has about more than 15 times the amount of calcium and over 10 times more the amount of iron and B vitamins - thiamine and riboflavin.

Having an offensive smell soyabean is mostly preferred in the roasted form. "Post roasting, some anti-nutrients get destroyed. Other nutrients like iron and some B vitamins which are in a bound form, get free and absorbed by the body," says Sunita.

FIGHTS THE FLAB

Those trying to beat their bulge will be happy to learn that soya is a great food for weight loss. It contains lecithin which works like an emulsifier and dissolves fat deposits. "Lecithin provides an excellent source of choline, which is essential for the normal functioning of every living cell in the body and is one of the main components of cell membranes. Without choline, the cell membranes would harden, prohibiting important nutrients from passing through the cell," says Honey Khanna, senior dietician, Max hospital. Scientists believe lecithin and choline may aid in memory and cognitive function, cardiovascular health, liver function, reproduction and athletic performance. This apart, soya is a rich source of fibre and provides satiety thereby reducing food cravings. When 25-year-old Sugandha Midha approached a dietician for a weight loss plan, she had no idea what a miracle soya would work. "I ate soya in the form of chunks, granules, tofu and soya milk

about three days a week and the results have been amazing. I have lost about 9 kg in the past three months," says Sugandha. Apart from a high fibre and high protein diet, a regular exercise pattern also contributed to her weight loss success, says her nutritionist.

HELPS CONTROL DIABETES

Soya contains complex carbohydrates with almost nil starch. "This makes it a healthy food for diabetics. It is also a great source of soluble fibre, which lowers cholesterol levels in the body," says Geetika. A few studies suggest that isoflavones (soya protein) increase insulin sensitivity and have a role to play in helping control diabetes and obesity. A report published in the *Journal of Agricultural Food and Chemistry* reveals that soya beans, when included in a daily diet, could have a powerful role to play in preventing the build-up of

sugar, and therefore lower the risk of diabetes and high cholesterol.

A study published in the *European Journal of Nutrition* in 2006 points that isoflavones seem to improve bone strength. This is why people in China and Japan very rarely have osteoporosis, despite their low consumption of dairy products in comparison to other countries. Unlike estrogen, which helps prevent the destruction of bone, evidence suggests that isoflavones may also assist in creating new bone.

Eating soya products also helps women with PMS symptoms and migraines. "I read about soya and started including it in my diet about five years ago. It has simply done wonders for me. My moods are under control, period irregularities have stopped and I feel less irritable," says Sharmila Mehta, an entrepreneur in her late forties.

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Soya, also known as soy was a proven wonder bean when it emerged on the food scene about a decade ago and can be used to boost your health in several ways



**SO(YA)
SO GOOD**

BETTER THAN HRT FOR MENOPAUSAL WOMEN

SOY, LIKE menopausal herbs, can be used as a safe alternative to hormone replacement therapy (HRT), offering most benefits of the therapy without any risks. It helps women deal with hormonal changes that occur in mid-life. Research confirms that a daily dose of soy protein can lessen the frequency and intensity of hot flushes and other hormone related symptoms. "It has helped women in period-related breast pain and can reduce menopausal side-effects such as hot flushes," says Geetika Ahluwalia, senior nutritionist, Delhi Heart and lung Institute. Soya is packed with natural hormones called isoflavones, part of the family of phytoestrogens (plant oestrogens). "I read about soya and started including it in my diet about five years ago. It has simply done wonders for me. My moods are under control, period irregularities have stopped and I feel less irritable," says Sharmila Mehta, an entrepreneur in her late forties.

