

[CA Cancer J Clin.](#) 2007 Sep-Oct;57(5):260-77.

Implications of phytoestrogen intake for breast cancer.

[Duffy C](#), [Perez K](#), [Partridge A](#).

Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA.

Phytoestrogens are a group of plant-derived substances that are structurally or functionally similar to estradiol. Interest in phytoestrogens has been fueled by epidemiologic data that suggest a decreased risk of breast cancer in women from countries with high phytoestrogen consumption. **Women with a history of breast cancer may seek out these "natural" hormones in the belief that they are safe or perhaps even protective against recurrence.** Interpretation of research studies regarding phytoestrogen intake and breast cancer risk is hampered by differences in dietary measurement, lack of standardization of supplemental sources, differences in metabolism amongst individuals, and the retrospective nature of much of the research in this area. Data regarding the role of phytoestrogens in breast cancer prevention is conflicting, but suggest early exposure in childhood or early adolescence may be protective. In several placebo-controlled randomized trials among breast cancer survivors, soy has not been found to decrease menopausal symptoms. **There is very little human data on the role of phytoestrogens in preventing breast cancer recurrence, but the few studies conducted do not support a protective role. There is in vivo animal data suggesting the phytoestrogen genistein may interfere with the inhibitive effects of tamoxifen on breast cancer cell growth.**