

PHYTOCHEMICALS...The Good For You Chemicals

By Sally Belles, RD, CFI

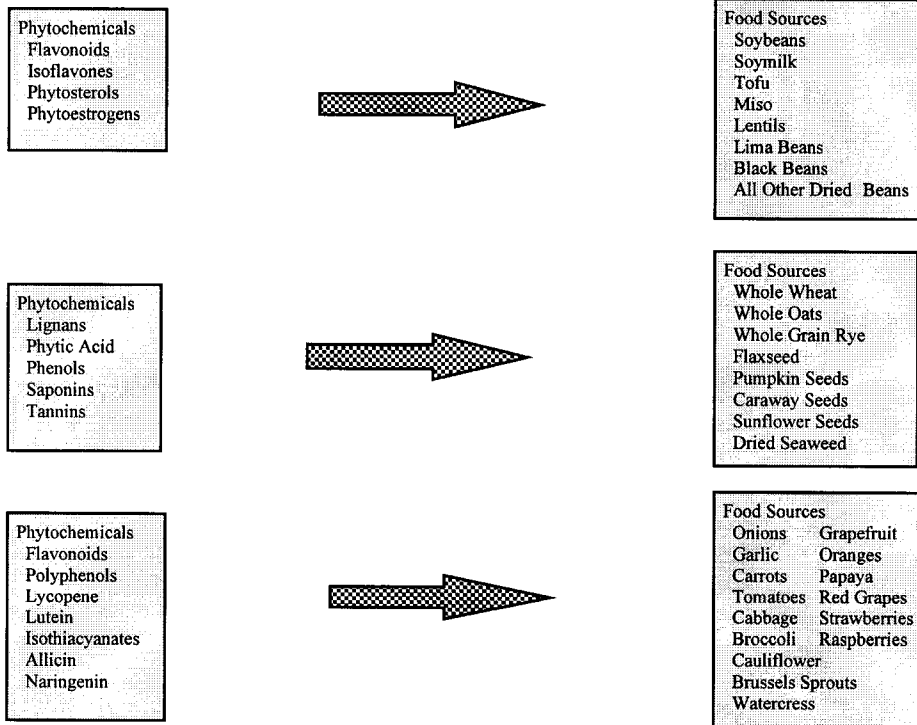
Phytochemicals...we know of them, we hear and read about them. Well, just what is all the buzz about?

There is a definite 'buzz' about the strange word *phytochemical*. Thus, it is appropriate to begin with defining it. Phytochemicals are non-nutritive components of plants, meaning they do not contribute any calories or other nutrients to the diet. Although not all phytochemicals are antioxidants, cancer protective compounds; those that are possess potent antioxidant properties. Simply stated, these plant-based compounds may play a role in cancer prevention and tumor growth suppression. In fact, it has been hypothesized that phytochemicals not only reduce the risk of some cancers but also for heart disease, cardiovascular health, osteoporosis, and the relief of menopausal symptoms. All of this may sound too good to be true...but read on!

Phytochemicals describe a wide class of compounds found in a variety of plant foods. Major plant sources include soybeans and legumes (dried beans), grains, nuts and seeds, as well as fruits and vegetables. For example, three primary phytochemicals found in soybeans are *Genistein, Diadzein, and Glycitein*. These are weak estrogens which may play a role in halting tumor growth thus stopping the spread of cancer cells. Although data is limited, there is some speculation that soy intake is associated with a decreased risk of premenopausal breast cancer. One Japanese research study found that tofu intake greater than three times per week was associated with a significant decrease in breast cancer risk in premenopausal women. Of potential importance to the study of prostate cancer in men, is the finding that phytochemical *isoflavones* such as genistein, appear in prostatic fluid and concentrations are highest in men from soyfood-consuming countries.

Whole grains, nuts and seeds also supply a variety of phytochemicals which may protect against hormonally mediated diseases such as breast cancer. These protective compounds are found in the germ and bran layers of grains. Such compounds may bind cancer causing substances limiting absorption and or contact with the gut. In the plasma, these compounds have been shown to lower glucose, insulin, cholesterol, and lipids (a type of fat).

Phytochemicals in fruits and vegetables have overlapping benefits on blood pressure, cholesterol levels, hormone metabolism, immunity and the body's ability to fight viral as well as bacterial infection. Although more research and human studies are necessary, regular consumption of soybeans, legumes, whole grains, nuts, seeds; and fruits and vegetables is justified. Phytochemicals offer something to everyone from persons with diabetes to those who are significantly overweight. How can we ensure that we are getting enough of these amazing phytochemicals? Read on!



Dietary Goals for increasing your intake of Phytochemicals

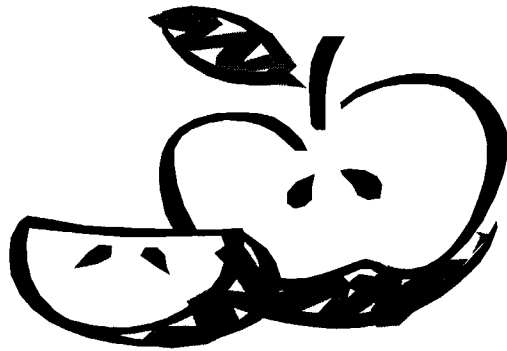
Consume a Plant-Based Diet

Make legumes, soybeans and soy products a major part of your diet

Eat a variety of whole grains from cereals, breads, rice and pasta

**Include a variety of nuts and seeds in your snacks, salads, etc.
and**

Choose a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables everyday



Recipe

EGGPLANT TOFU CURRY

4 large eggplants	1/2 cup canola oil	4 cups chopped Maui onions
8 cloves garlic, minced	6 tomatoes, peeled and chopped	
1/2 tsp. black pepper	1/2 tsp. turmeric	1/4 tsp. crushed red chiles
2 tbsp. ground coriander	18-20 ounces extra-firm tofu, cubed	
2 tsp. garam masala (available at health food stores and some markets)		
1/4-1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro		

Poke several holes in each eggplant with a fork. Bake at 400 degrees Fahrenheit for about 45 minutes or until they are soft. Let cool and then peel and chop them. Sauté onions and garlic in oil in a large skillet. When onions are soft add spices and sauté for 3 more minutes. Add tomatoes and cook for 5 minutes. Add the eggplant and cook another 5-10 minutes so the flavors can combine well. Add cubed tofu, garam masala and fresh cilantro just before serving. Serves 6-8.