

Tofu Facts

Tofu

Tofu, also known as soybean curd, is a soft, cheese-like food made by curdling fresh hot soy milk with a coagulant. Traditionally, the curdling agent used to make tofu is nigari – a compound found naturally in ocean water or calcium sulfate. Curds can also be produced by acidic liquids such as lemon juice or vinegar. Normally, these curds are then pressed into a solid block.

Tofu was first used in China around 200 B.C., but the discovery of the process for making tofu is lost to the ages. According to Chinese legend, the first batch of tofu was created by accident. A Chinese cook used nigari to flavor a batch of pureed, cooked soybeans and the combination produced the curd we know today as tofu. Today, tofu is a dietary staple throughout Asia. This delicate food is made fresh daily in thousands of small tofu shops to be sold on the street. In recipes, tofu acts like a sponge. It has the miraculous ability to soak up any flavor added to it. Crumble it into a pot of spicy sauce and it tastes like chili. Blend it with cocoa and sweetener and it becomes a double for chocolate cream pie filling. Cubes of firm tofu can be added to any casserole or soup.

Types of Tofu

Three main types of tofu are available in American grocery stores. Firm tofu is dense and solid. It holds up well in stir fry dishes, soups, on the grill, or anywhere you want tofu to maintain its shape. Firm tofu is higher in protein, fat, and calcium than other forms of tofu.

Soft tofu is a good choice for recipes that call for blended tofu or in Oriental soups. Silken tofu is made by a slightly different process that produces this creamy, custard-like product. Silken tofu works well in pureed or blended dishes. In Japan, silken tofu is enjoyed as is, seasoned with soy sauce and topped with chopped scallions.

Tofu is rich in high-quality protein. It is also a good source of B-vitamins and iron. When the curdling agent used to make tofu is calcium salt, the tofu becomes an excellent source of calcium. While 50% of the calories in tofu come from fat, a 4-ounce serving of tofu contains just 6 grams of fat. It is low in saturated fat and contains no cholesterol. Generally, the softer the tofu, the lower the fat content. Tofu is also very low in sodium, making it a perfect food for people on sodium restricted diets. For low-fat diets, reduced fat or "lite" tofu is available.

Four ounces of tofu provides:

Firm

Calories – 120g
Protein – 13g
Carbohydrates – 3g
Fat – 6g
Saturated – 1g
Cholesterol – 0g
Sodium – 9mg
Fiber – 1g
Calcium – 120mg
Iron – 8mg
% of calories from protein – 43
% of calories from carbohydrates - 10
% of calories from fat – 45

Soft

Calories – 86g
Protein – 9g
Carbohydrates - 2g
Fat - 5g
Saturated – 1g
Cholesterol – 0g
Sodium – 8mg
Fiber – 0g
Calcium – 130mg
Iron – 7mg
% of calories from protein – 39
% of calories from carbohydrates – 9
% of calories from fat – 52

Silken

Calories – 72g
Protein – 9.6g
Carbohydrates - 3.2g
Fat – 2.4g
Saturated – 0g
Cholesterol – 0g
Sodium – 76mg
Fiber – 0g
Calcium – 40mg
Iron – 1mg
% of calories from protein – 53
% of calories from carbohydrates – 17
% of calories from fat – 30

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