

TOFU

Ingredient of the Month

Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation
and Clemson University



Made from the curds of soybean milk in a similar process to that of cheese, tofu is often referred to as the “cheese of Asia.” It is a popular part of Asian cuisine and originated in China. “Tofu” is actually a Japanese term that stems from the Chinese word “doufu,” meaning bean curd. Americans’ reoccurring interest in natural and health foods has allowed tofu’s popularity and accessibility to grow in recent years. Nowadays, you can find tofu in most supermarkets, typically in thick, rectangular blocks with an off-white color.

While by itself or accompanied, tofu has a bland, slightly nutty flavor, its real appeal comes from its unique ability to adapt and take on the flavors of the food with which it is cooked. Texturally, tofu is both smooth and creamy, yet thick enough to slice, dice and mash into soups, stir-fries, casseroles, sauces and even salad dressings to add thickness or sustenance. Tofu’s high protein content without the saturated fat and cholesterol associated with most meat proteins has made it a healthy protein alternative for vegetarians and health enthusiasts alike.

Healthy ingredient contribution

PROTEIN: Soy protein found in tofu can help lower cholesterol, relieve symptoms of menopause and lower blood pressure.

TRYPTOPHAN: Tofu provides tryptophan, which is an essential amino acid and must come from diet. Tryptophan is also a precursor for niacin (vitamin B3), which helps the body capture and use energy released from carbohydrates, proteins and fats.

OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS: Tofu is a good source of these essential fatty acids that play a crucial role in brain function as well as normal growth and development. Omega-3 fatty acids have also been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease and can reduce inflammation with respect to cancer and arthritis.

IRON: Tofu is also a good source of iron, which is found in every living cell and is needed to transport and store oxygen throughout the body. Iron is also needed for proper brain and immune function.

CALCIUM: Tofu is often fortified with calcium, which helps build and maintain strong bones.

MAGNESIUM: Tofu is a good source of magnesium, which is important for nerve and heart function and aids in enzyme reactions.

Varieties and uses

- **Soft** or **silken** tofu has a smooth texture and a lower fat content. This variety is often used in thickening salad dressings, sauces, smoothies or desserts.
- **Firm** and **extra-firm** tofu possesses a thicker, cheese-like texture, with the highest fat content. These varieties are most commonly used in grilling, baking or stir-frying.

Storage

Tofu is available refrigerated in individual packages or in bulk, or non-refrigerated in aseptically-sealed containers. While aseptically-packaged tofu does not need to be refrigerated until it is opened, all other forms of tofu should be refrigerated in their container. Once opened, all types of tofu should be rinsed well, kept in a container covered with water and placed in the refrigerator. Changing the water daily will help keep tofu fresh for up to one week, but discard any tofu that exceeds the expiration date on the package. Tofu not used within a week can be frozen. Drain all water and wrap the tofu in plastic, foil or freezer wrap and store in the freezer for up to five months. However, freezing tofu will alter its normal texture and color, making it chewier and yellowish in color.

Serving size

A 4-oz. serving of reduced-fat firm tofu contains 70 calories, while also supplying 7 grams of soy protein.

Contributions to this article were made by Brigid McCarthy and Rachel Ellyn from Clemson University's Culinary Nutrition Undergraduate Student Research Group.

AMERICAN CULINARY FEDERATION

180 Center Place Way
St. Augustine, FL 32095
800.624.9458 | www.acfchefs.org



RECIPE

MAPO TOFU

Yield: 5 servings

Ingredients:

1 (1 lb.) package reduced-fat firm tofu , cut into 6 slices	½ t. lime juice
½ cup fat-free, less-sodium chicken broth	8 oz. lean ground pork
3 T. low-sodium soy sauce	1 T. grated peeled fresh ginger
2 T. hoisin sauce	3 garlic cloves , minced
1 T. rice vinegar	2 cups hot cooked long-grain brown rice
1 T. cornstarch	½ cup chopped green onions
1-2 t. chili garlic sauce	

Method:

Place tofu slices on several layers of paper towels; cover with additional paper towels. Place a dinner plate on top of covered tofu; let stand 30 minutes. Remove plate; discard paper towels. Cut tofu slices into ½-inch cubes. Combine broth with soy sauce, hoisin sauce, vinegar, cornstarch, chili garlic sauce and lime juice, stirring with a whisk. Heat large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add pork; cook 4 minutes or until done, stirring to crumble. Add ginger and garlic; cook 1 minute, stirring constantly. Add tofu; cook 4 minutes or until golden,



stirring frequently. Add broth mixture to pan. Bring to a boil; cook 1 minute or until mixture thickens. Remove from heat. Serve tofu mixture over rice. Sprinkle with onions.

Nutrition Information

Calories: 330	Fiber: 3g	Calcium: 20%
Fat: 12g	Protein: 19g	Iron: 15%
Sat. Fat: 4g	Vitamin A: 35%	
Carbs: 35g	Vitamin C: 4%	

This recipe was tested by Clemson University's Culinary Nutrition Undergraduate Student Research Group.