

[IMAGE]

Eat Soy: Prevent Baldness and Prostate Cancer?

DHT, or dihydrotestosterone, is a byproduct of the male hormone testosterone. A naturally occurring substance, DHT helps control the development and functioning of the prostate gland, and in most men, it's relatively harmless. However, high levels of DHT can overwhelm the body, especially if a man has poor blood circulation. Some studies have shown that DHT can damage hair follicles, leading to male pattern baldness. Other research has suggested that DHT can lead to an enlarged prostate or, in extreme cases, cancer of the prostate gland.

Over the years, many drugs have been developed in the hopes of blocking the effects of DHT, but these drugs have brought with them a variety of unwanted side-effects. Researchers in the U.S. and China recently discovered that the answer to stopping DHT may be as easy as eating soy.

The scientists conducted a pair of experiments on rats. Both sets of rats were injected with "equol," a molecule abundant in soybeans and other soy-based products. While the equol did not prevent DHT from being made, it "handcuffed" the hormone by binding to and deactivating it.

"Directly binding and inactivating DHT without influencing testosterone gives equol the ability to reduce many of the harmful effects of androgens [male hormones] without affecting the beneficial ones," said the study's lead researcher. Another one of the study authors added that the findings "are of immense clinical importance."

Reference:

Lund TD, Munson DJ, Haldy ME, et al. Equol is a novel anti-androgen that inhibits prostate growth and hormone feedback. *Biology of Reproduction* 2004;70:1188-1195.

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