

So Much Tempeh!

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Full disclosure – I have never been a huge fan of the taste of tempeh. For me, tempeh often tastes “off”. I have tasted delicious homemade tempeh, but I have never made it myself. Writing this article forced me to step outside of my tempeh comfort zone, and that is always a good thing. I just ordered my first tempeh starter and purchased organic soybeans! If you have been reluctant to give tempeh a try, this article is for you.

What is tempeh?

Tempeh is a fermented bean block (or bean “cake”) originating in Indonesia. While it is generally made with soybeans, tempeh can be made with chickpeas, adzuki beans, black beans, or other legumes. Sometimes, it has grains or seeds added. Tempeh is made with cooked legumes that are fermented using *Rhizopus oligosporus* mold. Because it is fermented, tempeh is quite dense and meaty in texture. The flavor of tempeh can be strong – for some, it is an acquired taste!



Tempeh Nutrition

Tempeh is a nutritious addition to any plant-based diet. It is bean-based, so a great source of protein and iron. It is also a high source of riboflavin, niacin, vitamin B6, and magnesium. When compared to tofu, tempeh offers two big advantages:

1. It is high in fiber, so it is a natural source of prebiotics.
2. It is fermented, so is a natural source of probiotics.

Of course, fermented foods not only provide probiotics, but they make minerals more bioavailable.

Nutritional Content of Tempeh (soybean)

Nutrient	Amount in 1 cup (166 g) tempeh	Percent of the DV
Calories	319	
Protein	33.7 g	67%
Fat	17.9 g	23%
Carbohydrate	12.7 g	-
Fiber	16 g	57%
Thiamin	0.13 mg	11%
Riboflavin	0.6 mg	46%
Niacin	4.4 mg	28%
B6	0.36 mg	21%
Folate	40 mcg	10%
Calcium	184 mg	14%
Iron	4.5 mg	25%
Magnesium	134 mg	32%
Potassium	684 mg	15%
Sodium	15 mg	0.6%
Zinc	1.9 mg	17%

Source: USDA Nutrient Database FoodData Central

Key: High Source >20% of the Daily Value (DV)

Low Source <5% of the Daily Value (DV)

Does tempeh have health benefits?

Absolutely! Tempeh is an exceptionally healthy food. It is one of the top plant-based fermented foods. Fermentation does a couple of impressive things. First, it helps to break down antinutrients such as phytates, which enhances the digestibility of nutrients. Second, it is a source of both prebiotics and probiotics – both of which help to build and maintain a healthy gut microbiome. Prebiotics are essentially food for beneficial gut bacteria. They help to increase the formation of protective short-chain fatty acids in the colon. Probiotics are healthy gut microbes, so they can help build a better microbiome.

Some evidence suggests that tempeh helps to reduce blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels. It has also been shown to reduce oxidative stress, have anticancer activity, and stabilize blood glucose levels.

Commercial vs Homemade Tempeh

Commercial tempeh is available in health food stores, grocery stores, and supermarkets. Some farmer's markets also offer locally produced tempeh. When you purchase commercial tempeh, it should be firm, and the exterior mold should be white without much discoloration. It should not be slimy or mushy.

Homemade tempeh is gaining popularity as it tends to be milder in flavor and fresher than store-bought varieties. You need just 3 ingredients to make tempeh – soybeans (or other beans), starter culture (a white powder), and vinegar. As for equipment, you need a large pot, pressure cooker or Instant Pot, a sieve, zip lock bags or banana leaves, and a wire rack. The easiest way to learn to make tempeh is to watch a video online. Here are three excellent instructional videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E32XWv8EpAs>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxG_S0Q-bAg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKmwcLfWL-k>

How to Use Tempeh

Tempeh can be used much in the same way meat is used – in savory dishes – using thick slices, thin slices, cubes, or crumbles.

Tempeh is best cooked. Raw tempeh can harbor bacteria that can cause foodborne illness. Steaming tempeh helps to remove the stronger bitter flavors. It also reduces its density and allows it to absorb flavors from marinades more readily. Once steamed, you can proceed with baking, sautéing, grilling, or other cooking methods.

Some of the most popular ways of eating tempeh are:

- As a replacement for bacon or commercial veggie bacon – tempeh bacon can be made by slicing tempeh very thinly, marinading, and cooking it.
- As a main-dish meat replacement – marinade then bake, sauté, or grill for a super healthy alternative to meat or veggie meat.
- As a protein-rich topping for salads, bowls, and pasta dishes – bake, air-fry, or sauté cubes of tempeh.
- As a ground meat substitute in casseroles, chili, and other dishes.
- Slice and cook for sandwiches, wraps, sushi, and other dishes.



Tempting Tempeh Recipes

There are a multitude of tempeh recipes to try. Today's show provides enough to keep you occupied for some time, but once you have exhausted those, continue exploring possibilities online.

Tempeh Reuben Sandwich

Makes 1 sandwich

If you like, include a slice of vegan Swiss cheese, and serve this plant-based version of the classic with a sliced kosher dill pickle!

2 slices rye, or other hearty bread, toasted

2 teaspoons Dijon or stone-ground mustard, or to taste

90 grams smoked maple tempeh or other marinated cooked tempeh in thin slices

3 slices tomato

1/2 avocado, sliced (optional)

Arugula or other greens

1/4 cup (60 ml) sauerkraut or a few slices of dill pickles (optional)

1. Spread mustard on both pieces of toast.
2. Place the tempeh on one piece.
3. Top with tomato slices, sauerkraut or pickles, arugula, and the other slice of toast. Enjoy!



**Tempeh Reuban Sandwich
with Tempeh Slices**



**Gado Gado Platter
with Tempeh Cubes**

Crispy Tempeh

Cooking tempeh in broth or water, or steaming it above water, allows the marinade to penetrate. Tempeh works well in stir-fries, in dinner bowls, on salads, with Gado Gado (pictured above and served with peanut sauce), and in sandwiches.

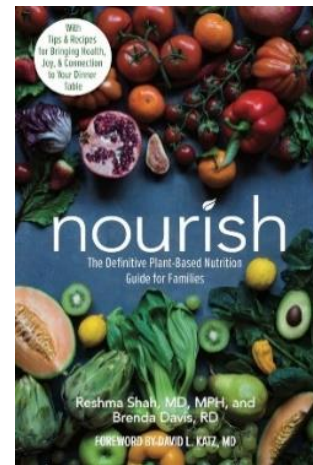
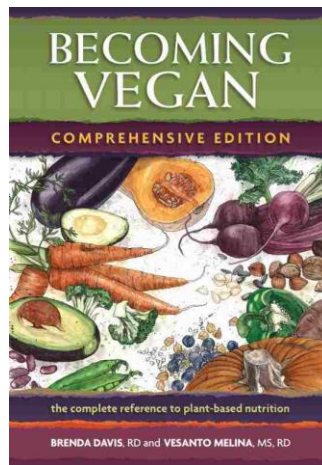
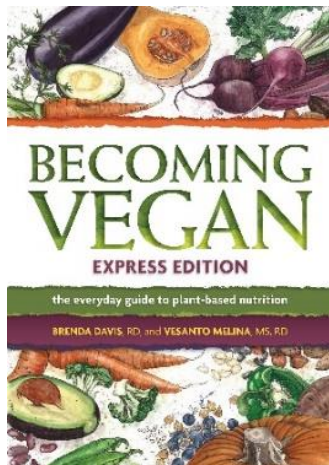
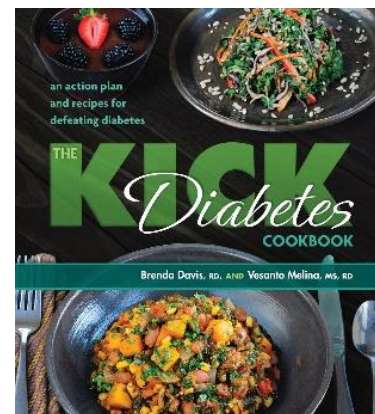
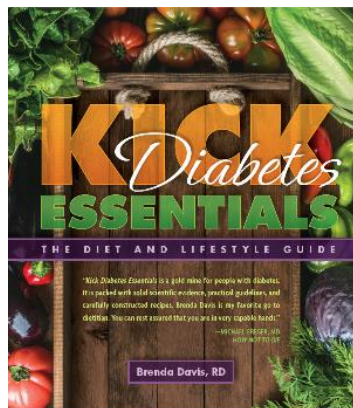
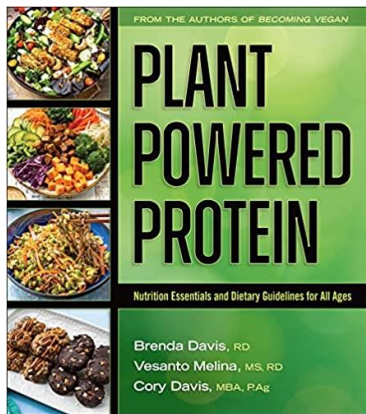
8 oz (227 g) tempeh

2 cups (500 ml) vegetable broth or water

Seasoning mix of your choice

2 teaspoon (10 ml) tamari

1. Slice the tempeh into 1/3-inch slices or 3/4- inch cubes.
2. Place the vegetable broth in a saucepan, bring to a boil, and add the tempeh. Lower the heat and simmer for at least 10 minutes.
3. With a slotted spoon, remove the slices from the broth and set on a plate or tray.
4. Dip or spray the tempeh with tamari on both sides and sprinkle with seasonings of your choice – a mixed all-purpose seasoning works well.
5. Heat a non-stick skillet or pan over medium heat. Cook for 2-3 minutes or until it starts to brown. Flip and cook on the second side for 2-3 minutes. If you don't have a non-stick pan, you can use a little spray to prevent sticking, or you can bake the tempeh.



This article was originally written for So Many Cooks in the Kitchen. Brenda Davis, RD is a plant-based pioneer and author/co-author of 13 books on plantbased diets. She is co-Author of Nourish: the definitive plant-based nutrition guide for families, Becoming Vegan: Comprehensive and Express Editions and Kick Diabetes Essentials. www.brendadavisrd.com