

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

July 9, 2009

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776  
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu

## Try Tamari

As popular as Chinese food is these days, most of us have heard of and probably have tasted soy sauce. You get Chinese take-out for dinner, the little packs of soy sauce come along. Stop at a Chinese restaurant for a meal, there are bottles of soy sauce on every table. If you're adventurous enough for sushi or sashimi, there's the soy sauce too. But have you tried the thicker cousin of soy, Tamari?

Like soy, tamari is a salty flavoring used in or on many Asian dishes. But there are differences too. Tamari is more of a Japanese sauce, although it is used in many other Asian countries and their foods. Where soy sauce is runny like water, tamari is thicker. You can pour soy sauce on your egg rolls, but you dip them in tamari.

Most soy sauces are made using half wheat and half soy, so people with gluten allergy can not use them. Tamari is made by fermenting soy beans for 5 or 6 months. Some brands use a very small amount of wheat to start the fermentation, but true Japanese tamari has no wheat at all. You are much more likely to find wheat-free tamari sauce to add authentic Asian flavor.

With the longer fermentation time compared to soy sauce, and since tamari is made from whole beans instead of purified proteins, tamari usually has a smoother, more mellow flavor. Some people don't like soy because they can detect a bitter after-taste. Tamari sauce is not bitter, and rarely leaves any aftertaste or bitterness.

Since tamari starts with soy beans it does have protein and some free amino

acids. These give tamari a deep, rich flavor and aroma that enhances flavors, especially of meat. A little tamari added to broth makes it taste much richer, like it has lots more meat. Using tamari as part of the sauce for a vegetable stir-fry can make the veggie flavors really stand out and make you feel like you're getting more meat. This can help stretch a food budget when money is tight, and introduce your family to a wider range of flavors at the same time.

Another difference is that if you're not careful, soy sauce will cook off if the temperature in the pan is too high. That leaves a dark sticky goo with a bitter flavor. Because tamari is thicker it is not as likely to disappear in high heat, so your dish keeps its good flavors.

Of course the problem with both soy and tamari sauces is that they have a lot of sodium. There are some reduced sodium brands available but you'll not find a really low-sodium tamari because the salt is necessary for the fermentation. Each tablespoon of either sauce has about 1000 mg of sodium, or almost 2/3 of our daily recommended amount. But the good thing is that since tamari adds the mellow, meaty flavor and aroma, you usually need less of it than you would soy or salt. Use about 1/4 less tamari for the same flavor. You get less sodium in your finished dish, but more flavor.

Traditionally tamari is used as a table or dipping sauce for dumplings, sushi or other Japanese dishes, or a part of a stir-fry sauce. We can add it to hamburgers, meatloaf and barbeque sauces, American style. It's also good as a marinade for beef, chicken, pork or fish. A little drizzled over grilling veggies or pineapple rings really perks them up too, the salt balancing the sweetness.

Here's a great salad dressing for a big green salad. Use a bag of salad greens

then enhance them with some chopped tomato, green pepper, cucumber, a little green onion if you like. Add a can of tuna, some leftover cooked chicken, or even some flaked canned salmon. Add some whole grain crackers and a beverage, you have a full meal. If you don't have rice vinegar, use just 1/3 cup of cider vinegar instead.

#### Tamari Sesame Dressing

1/4 C Florida orange juice

1/2 C rice vinegar

2 Tbsp reduce sodium tamari sauce

1 Tbsp dark sesame oil

1 Tbsp honey

1 tsp freshly grated ginger

Put all ingredients in a small jar and whisk, or cap tightly and shake, until the honey is dissolved. Refrigerate until ready to use. Will keep for a week or longer refrigerated.

Serves 6.