

Delicious, Nourishing Miso

by Lori Tsugawa Whaley

History

Miso, fermented soybeans, has been an important part of the Japanese diet throughout their history. Although the origins of miso in Japan are not completely clear, Japan has used miso perhaps as early as the Neolithic era, Japan's Jomon period, roughly 14,000-3,000 BC. Miso was used to preserve food, add flavoring, and enhance dietary nutrition.

Over the last 50 years, miso has become available and known worldwide because of its health benefits and flavor. Today, miso soup has become synonymous with Japanese food. Miso has been used in other Asian countries as well, but today I will focus on miso use in Japan. Traditional Japanese miso is made by soaking soybeans with salt, cooking, and then fermenting with salt and koji (the fungus *Aspergillus oryzae*). Fermentation is the key to miso's health benefits. The result is a thick paste used in sauces, soups, spreads, pickling, and marinating, and it has become a Japanese culinary staple.

Modern Miso

In earlier days, the process of making miso was labor intensive. However, in the 21st century, technology has been automated and simplified, making miso available for consumers around the globe. As well as less intensive production, modern technology and science has also given us insight into why miso is so beneficial to us!

Miso is high in protein, rich in vitamins and minerals, and has gained interest/popularity worldwide. Miso can be considered a complete food; it's extremely healthy, delicious, easy to use and find, and filling.

Mother always told me that Japanese people ate miso soup at the beginning of their meal to aid in digestion...now I understand why!

Let's take a look at miso's health benefits:

- Contains dietary fiber for the digestive system
- Helps the body produce digestive fluids
- Strengthens blood
- Supports the immune system
- Contains good bacteria from the fermentation process
- Helps fight free radicals

Miso has been and still remains a popular and key ingredient in Japanese cuisine. For centuries, miso has kept the Japanese people healthy and living long lives. According to the World Health Organization 2017, Japan's life expectancy at birth is 83.7 years; the highest in the world. For a longer and healthier life, why not follow the ancient wisdom of Japan and add miso to your diet?

Lori Tsugawa Whaley is a third-generation Japanese-American and a descendant of the Samurai Warrior. As an inspirational speaker, she is on a mission to teach individuals who want to make a difference in the world with the Ancient Principles of the Samurai so that they can live their lives with courage, honor, and integrity.

Miso paste comes in a wide range of flavors. This is a medium bodied miso made from soy beans and barley.

Make and taste miso soup, creamy miso dressing, and grilled miso tofu with Lori on February 17 in Tacoma. Details on page 10.



Beautifully presented traditional miso soup and miso dressing.

You can find a great selection of organic miso at Marlene's - I particularly like Miso Master; it is American-made, certified gluten free, and crafted using traditional Japanese techniques—does it get any better?