

Gone Fishin'

OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS CAN HELP SAVE YOUR HEART AND YOUR EYES AND MAYBE EVEN REDUCE YOUR CANCER RISK

By Stephanie R. Conner

Only in your dreams has a doctor told you that fat is actually good for you. Well, this time you aren't dreaming. Some fats *are* good for you. But don't break out the candy bars and ice cream just yet. There are different types of fat. And the good fats can be found in foods that you might already know are good for you—fish, flaxseed and walnuts.

Omega-3 fatty acids are a polyunsaturated fat, explains Suzanne Henson, R.D., coordinator for the EatRight Weight Management Program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. And there are three types of omega-3 fatty acids: alphalinolenic acid (LNA), which is found in tofu, soybean and canola oils, and nuts; and eicosapentenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexenoic acid (DHA), which are found in seafood. These fats work differently in your body than other types do, and

have been shown to increase heart health and improve eye development. Some research suggests they might even help reduce cancer risks.

Have a Heart

"Omega-3s are most widely known for reducing the risk of heart disease," Henson says. "They help lower blood triglycerides, which are associated with heart disease, help thin the blood and may prevent harmful, irregular heartbeats."

Researchers say that omega-3s may help make the blood less sticky and less likely to clot in the arteries, which reduces the risk of heart attack and stroke.

People who eat at least some fish on a weekly basis are less likely to suffer from coronary heart disease or experience sudden heart attacks than those who don't eat any fish, the American Heart Association reports.

To that end, the AHA recommends eating fish twice a week.

The Eyes Have It

Omega-3s are also thought to improve eye function because DHA is naturally concentrated in the retina. An August 2001 study published in the *Archives of Ophthalmology* showed that those who ate more fish were less likely to develop age-related macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in adults.

The International Food Information Council adds that women who ate fatty fish while pregnant gave birth to children with better visual development. And babies who are breastfed by mothers who have significant levels of DHA in their diets tend to have faster-than-normal eyesight development. In fact, because of the importance in brain and eye development, some

ZESTY BAKED SALMON

Ingredients

- 1 pound salmon fillets
- Vegetable cooking spray
- 2 tablespoons chopped green onions
- 1 tablespoon low-fat mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon plain nonfat yogurt
- 1 teaspoon lemon-pepper seasoning
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon dry mustard
- Chopped green onions (optional)
- Lemon slices (optional)



Directions

Place salmon, skin side down, in a baking pan coated with cooking spray. Bake at 425 degrees Fahrenheit for 18 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Combine 2 tablespoons green onions and next five ingredients, and spread evenly

over fish. Bake two additional minutes or until sauce is bubbly. To serve, transfer fish to service plates. If desired, sprinkle with additional chopped green onions, and garnish with lemon slices.

Yield: 4 servings

Nutritional information per serving:

Calories, 164 (35 percent from fat); fat, 6 g; (Sat 2 g, Mono 2 g, Poly 2 g); Protein, 23 g; Carbohydrate, 2 g; Fiber, trace; Cholesterol, 70mg; Sodium, 334 mg

Source: *From the EatRight Heart Smart Cookbook*.

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infant formulas are also being enriched with DHA and EPA, says Jenna Anding, Ph.D., R.D., assistant professor and extension nutrition specialist at Texas A&M University.

The Replacements

The best place to find omega-3s is in higher-fat coldwater fish such as salmon, tuna and mackerel, Anding says. But if you aren't a seafood lover, don't despair. Canola oil, olive oil and soybean oil all contain omega-3s.

"I like to keep canola oil and olive oil in my kitchen," Henson says. "Canola oil is a great all-purpose oil to use."

If you'd prefer to stay away from water creatures, you can also try flaxseed for your regular dose of omega-3.

"Flaxseed is really interesting," Henson says. "In the United States, people think of linen. But flaxseeds are wonderful. You can toast them and put them in your cereal. You can buy ground flaxseed or grind your own like you'd grind coffee beans."

And that's not all. In addition to the cardiovascular and other benefits of all omega-3s, flaxseed has been linked to reducing cancer risks, Henson says.

If you still think flaxseed belongs in your closet, not in your stomach, there is yet another option: walnuts.

"Walnuts are easy for most people to work in on a day-to-day basis," Henson says. "I like to toast walnuts to bring the flavor out and keep them in my refrigerator, so



Dennis Boissavy/Taxi

that I can easily add them—about 1 teaspoon—to my cereal in the morning, or as a topping for a parfait of fat-free flavored yogurt."

A Fishy Problem

While you can take pills and vitamins for just about anything, Henson advises staying away from fish oil supplements.

"People might take fish oil capsules instead," she says. "But there are safety issues with fish oil supplements."

Anding agrees.

"There is concern that large amounts of fish oils—through consuming fish oil supplements—may increase bleeding and cause gastrointestinal distress," she says.

So talk to your doctor about your options and, in the meantime, stay away from supplements and try to get your omega-3s straight from the fish's mouth. ☺



HOOK, LINE & SINKER

Omega-3 content of fish and shellfish

Amounts are in grams per 3-ounce portion

Finfish

Catfish, channel, farmed, cooked, dry heat	0.2
Cod, Atlantic, cooked, dry heat	0.1
Salmon, Atlantic, farmed, cooked, dry heat	1.8
Salmon, Chinook, cooked, dry heat	1.5
Salmon, Chinook, smoked, (lox), regular	0.4
Tuna, light, canned in water, drained solids	0.2
Tuna, white, canned in water, drained solids	0.7
Tuna, yellowfin, fresh, cooked, dry heat	0.2

Mollusks

Clam, mixed species, cooked, moist heat	0.2
Scallop, mixed species, cooked, dry heat	0.3

Shellfish

Crab, Alaska king, cooked, moist heat	0.4
Crab, Alaska king, imitation, made from surimi	0.5
Crab, blue, cooked, moist heat	0.4

* Cooked without added fat or sauces

Source: USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference
Via International Food Information Council