

In Honor of Valentine's Day I Present to You: Heart Healthy Omega-3 Fatty Acids!

Why is everyone making such a fuss about omega-3 fatty acids? What the heck is an omega-3 fatty acid? Is it something bad?

Actually, the omega-3 fatty acids (DHA and EPA) are a type of polyunsaturated fat that studies show lower the risk of heart disease, stroke and cancer; lower triglycerides and cholesterol; and improve blood pressure. Omega-3's also help with eye health, proper growth and development in children, improve brain function and reduce the risk for brain diseases such as Alzheimer's.

That sounds great! Where can I get omega-3's? Well, fish and shellfish are the richest source of omega-3's. In fact, our goal as adults should be to consume 2-5 servings of healthy fish and shellfish per week. For pregnant woman and children 2 servings of fish or shellfish is recommended per week. The best fish and shellfish sources are low in mercury (which is a poison) and sustainable. Sustainable means that the fish were caught using a method that does not completely use up or destroy all the natural resources. For more information about the best fish and shellfish to eat, check out EWG or Environmental Working Group's Good Seafood Guide. Some of the best types of fish to eat include: wild salmon, black cod, herring, sardines, anchovies, pacific oysters, trout, shrimp, tilapia, and Atlantic and Pacific mackerel, but not king mackerel. We should all avoid the following fish because of high mercury content, but pregnant woman and children should never, ever eat the following: tilefish, shark, swordfish, and king mackerel.

Another important thing to consider is how fish is cooked. Avoid breaded and deep fried fish. Steaming, baking, and grilling are great ways to cook fish and shellfish. Do not blacken the fish as this can release carcinogens. I recommend that babies, young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and anyone with immune compromise avoid sushi or raw fish due to the potential for food-borne illness.

What if you don't like fish? What if you are a vegan or vegetarian? Other sources of omega-3's include: soybean oil and soy nuts, canola oil, walnuts, ground flaxseed, and eggs enriched with omega-3 fatty acids. Another option is to take omega-3 fatty acid supplements but of course any supplement or vitamin is never as good as eating the real thing.

Happy Eating!

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