

Nutrition News

Information for Senior Citizens

*Developed by Colorado State University Extension
Department of Food Science & Human Nutrition*

Importance of Omega-3 Fats in Health & Disease

Although Americans have a high rate of heart disease and are advised to lower the amount of fat in their diet, fat itself isn't always the cause of heart disease. In fact, scientists now know that there is a certain kind of polyunsaturated fat that can help prevent heart disease.

Did you know . . .

Eskimos often eat about a pound of high-fat fish, whale, and seal meat daily, yet rarely have heart attacks.

This discovery caused doctors and scientists to change their thinking about fat. Fish contains a special kind of polyunsaturated fat, called omega-3 fatty acids. Our bodies cannot make these fats, so they must be obtained from foods.

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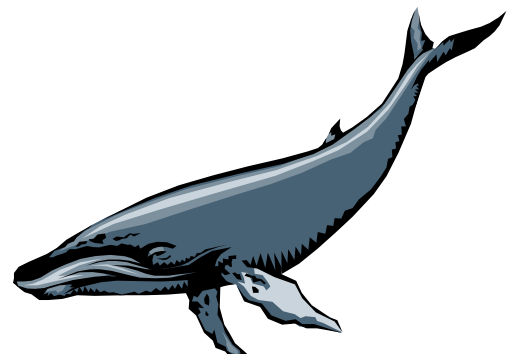
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Omega-3 fatty acids are important for your health. They provide structure for cell membranes and tissues throughout the body and are found in especially high concentration in the brain, and retina of the eye.

In addition to their structural roles, omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to play a role in the prevention and/or treatment of certain diseases including:

- ✓ Coronary heart disease
- ✓ Atherosclerosis
- ✓ Stroke
- ✓ Cancer
- ✓ High cholesterol
- ✓ Mild hypertension
- ✓ Rheumatoid arthritis

So, does this mean that everyone should eat a pound of whale meat a day like the Eskimos do? No, studies show that just two to three servings of fish per week is enough to lower your risk of heart disease.



Dietary Sources of Omega-3's

All fish contain some omega-3 fatty acids. Those highest are high-fat, cold-water varieties, including mackerel, salmon, herring, and albacore tuna. Sardines and trout are also good sources.



Fish are not only excellent sources of omega-3's, they are also great sources of protein, iron and zinc and are lower in saturated fat compared to beef. In addition, canned salmon, mackerel, and sardines with bones are excellent sources of calcium.

For many people who are not used to eating or cooking fish, getting started can be hard. Use the following tips to increase the fish in your diet.

- Start slow. Try substituting one fish meal each week for a typical beef, chicken or pork meal.
- Add a can of albacore tuna to your favorite casserole, salad or soup.
- Try adding fish to tacos or burritos instead of beef.
- Try tuna or salmon salad made with low-fat mayonnaise on your sandwich for lunch.
- Try fish steaks such as swordfish, tuna, halibut or salmon. Marinate the fish, then grill or broil it.
- Try tilapia or mackerel for dinner.
- Be creative and don't be afraid to try new foods.



While fish are great sources of omega-3 fatty acids, these important fats can also be found in flax seed, walnuts, and omega-3 enriched eggs. But fatty fish and the omega-3 eggs provide a more available and richer source.

Safety Concerns with Eating Fish

You may have heard concerns about the mercury levels in fish on the news or in the newspaper. So, should you be concerned?

Because of pollution, many fish caught in the wild may contain toxins and contaminants that could be harmful to certain groups of people. Questions are now being asked about farm-raised fish and PCB levels. Eating farm-raised salmon, often called Atlantic salmon, can be enjoyed weekly.

The current FDA recommendation is to eat up to 12 ounces of fish per week. Pregnant or nursing women and children should avoid shark, swordfish, tilefish and mackerel, all of which contain high levels of mercury. However, these people can still enjoy up to 12 ounces per week of other types of fish.

Can I Still Eat My Favorite Foods?

Yes, adding fish to your diet does not mean that you have to give up all of your old favorites. Use the Dietary Guidelines and MyPyramid to design an eating plan that is right for you. Have you been to your library to print out your own copy of MyPyramid that meets your needs? If you have a computer, explore the MyPyramid.gov web site.

Be sure to include a variety of foods from all of the food groups to ensure that you are getting all of the nutrients your body needs. Remember, the key to a healthy diet is balance. If you want to have bacon and eggs for example, choose foods low in fat and cholesterol throughout the rest of the day. Bacon is a high-fat meat and therefore should be used sparingly. However, it can be fit into your daily meal plan occasionally.

The sample menu on the following page provides 1,600 calories and 53 grams of fat. After an egg and three medium slices of bacon for breakfast, 37 grams of fat remain to be incorporated throughout the rest of the day.

Sample Menu



Breakfast

- 1 egg, fried (6 g fat)
- 3 medium slices bacon (10 g fat)
- 1 slice whole wheat toast (1 g fat)
- 1 tsp butter or margarine (4 g fat)
- 6 oz calcium-fortified orange juice

Snack

- ½ cup strawberries

Lunch

- Large tossed salad
- ¼ cup nonfat salad dressing
- 2 breadsticks with 1 tsp olive oil dip (5 g fat)
- 1 kiwifruit, sliced
- 6 oz low-sodium tomato juice

Snack

- ½ cup fat-free cottage cheese

Dinner

- 1 Salmon Flattie (9 g fat)
- 6 spears asparagus with 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- ½ cup noodles with 1 tsp butter or margarine (5 g fat)
- 1 whole wheat dinner roll (1 g fat)
- 8 oz skim milk
- 1 2-inch piece chocolate cake (7 g fat)

Menu Provides: 52 grams fat

Quick Tip:

Don't forget, the *American Dietetic Association's Hotline* is 1-800-366-1655. And, for more information on fats and cholesterol, call your local county Extension office. In Colorado, request CSU Extension's Fact Sheet 9.316, *Updating Food Preparation to Promote Health*.

Salmon Flatties

Ingredients:

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|--|-------------------------------------|
| One 7½-oz can salmon, w/ bones & liquid | 1 large clove garlic, finely minced |
| ¼ cup nonfat mayonnaise | ¼ tsp lemon-pepper seasoning |
| 1 Tbsp prepared mustard | ¼ cup raw wheat germ |
| 2 Tbsp each: chopped, celery, onion, and bell pepper | |

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients, mix well and refrigerate 1 hour.
2. Divide into six balls, flatten into patties.
3. Spray skillet with non-fat cooking spray and heat to medium-low.
4. Cook Flatties about 4-5 minutes on each side, until golden brown.

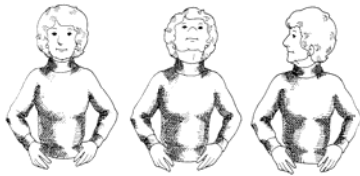
Yields 3 servings (9 grams fat per serving)

Fitness Focus: Increasing your flexibility

It's been awhile since we talked about stretching and the importance of flexibility. We mentioned that stretching is especially important to those with arthritis because it helps keep joints agile and reduces pain. It can also help some types of lower back pain and stiffness. It's important to remember that stretching works best if you warm up first. Try brisk walking, cycling, or jogging in place.

When you can feel your heart beating faster and you start to feel warm, your muscles are ready for slow, gentle stretches. As the muscles and tendons start to relax, you can increase the stretch slightly, but only till you feel tension, not pain.

Be sure to see your doctor before starting any exercise program, as exercises may raise blood pressure in some people, and some exercises may not be suitable for everyone. For more information on exercise, phone Age Page, 1-800-222-2225, and ask for a copy of "Don't Take It Easy--Exercise."



1.



2.

1. Neck Extension: *to improve flexibility and range of motion of neck.* Sit up comfortably. Bend head forward until chin touches chest; then bend it backward as far as it will go. Return to starting position and slowly rotate head to left. Return to starting position and slowly rotate head to right. Return to starting position. Suggested repetitions: 5.

2. Single Knee Pull: *to stretch low back and back of leg.* Lie on back, hands at sides. Pull one leg to chest, grasp with both arms and hold for five counts. Repeat with opposite leg. Suggested repetitions: 3 - 5.

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Senior Resource: How can Food Stamps be used?

Most food stores will accept the EBT (electronic benefits transfer) card, but if you are not sure, you should ask the manager before you shop. You use the EBT card in the same way you would use a debit card. In addition to buying food at the grocery store, senior citizens may also use Food Stamps (EBT card) to purchase home-delivered "meals-on-wheels" or elderly group meals, which are served at the senior citizen service center.

The Older Americans Act provides hot lunches during the week at low or no cost to any interested senior citizen. Contact your county Cooperative Extension office or the area agency on aging for addresses of the luncheon sites in your area.

For more information and to find out if you or someone you know qualifies for food stamps, call 1-800-221-5689.