

## For a Healthier Diet, Go Fish – Fish: Catch a Bounty of Health Benefits

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Grill it, poach it, broil it, fry it. Any way you cook it, fish really is brain food. Not only that, but according to research, also food for your heart, prostate and more. Fish, particularly fatty fish, is a good source of the Omega-3 fatty acids, eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to be beneficial in a multitude of ways. The American Heart Association recommends two servings per week of fish such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna and salmon. All types of seafood contain some of the Omega-3 fatty acids, but the darker fish such as salmon contain more than lighter fish such as cod or halibut. Benefits to your heart may include:

- Decreased risk of cardiac arrhythmias.
- Decreased blood clot formation, sometimes involved in heart attacks and strokes.
- Decreased triglyceride levels.
- Decreased growth rate of atherosclerotic plaque.
- Improved artery health.
- Lower blood pressure.

French researcher Pascale Barberger-Gateau found that just one serving a week of fish decreased the risk of developing dementia by 30 percent. Eating fatty fish several times a week may also lower the risk of developing prostate cancer by as much as half. A Swedish study of 3,500 postmenopausal women eating two servings of fatty fish a week found they were 40 percent less likely to develop endometrial cancer than those eating less than one-fourth of a serving a week.

Fish consumption during pregnancy may result in a lower risk of preterm delivery or low birth weight. DHA in particular is essential for infant brain and eye development. It may even help prevent postpartum depression.

However, be aware that several types of fish - swordfish, shark, king mackerel, tuna and tilefish - are unsafe in any amount for pregnant or breastfeeding women, women of childbearing age who may become pregnant, and small children, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's advisory.

There is concern that these fish may contain high amounts of methylmercury, which has the potential to cause nervous system damage to a developing fetus and other damage to those at risk. Methylmercury is an industrial contaminant that sometimes finds its way into the waters in which fish live. The FDA states that no more than 12 ounces of cooked fish a week may be safely eaten by those in the high-risk groups, with choices coming from shellfish, canned fish, smaller ocean fish or farm-raised fish.

When shopping for fish, how do you know if it is fresh? Here are some clues:

- The fish's eyes should be clear and bulge a little. Only a few fish, such as walleye, have naturally cloudy eyes.
- Whole fish and fillets should have firm and shiny flesh. Dull flesh may mean the fish is old. Fresh whole fish also should have bright red gills, free from slime.
- If the flesh doesn't spring back when pressed, the fish isn't fresh.
- There should be no darkening around the edges of the fish or brown or yellowish discoloration.
- The fish should smell fresh and mild, not fishy or ammonia-like.

It's always safest to cook seafood and it's a must for at-risk people. The FDA 1997 Food Code recommends cooking most seafood to an internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit (63 C) for 15 seconds. If you don't have a meat thermometer, there are other ways to determine if seafood is done:

- For fish, slip the point of a sharp knife into the flesh and pull aside. The edges should be opaque and the center slightly translucent with flakes beginning to separate. Let the fish stand three to four minutes to finish cooking.
- For shrimp, lobster and scallops, check color. Shrimp and lobster turn red and the flesh becomes pearly opaque. Scallops turn milky white or opaque and firm.

- For clams, mussels and oysters, watch for the point at which their shells open. That means they're done. Throw out those that stay closed.

For the latest in food safety information and consumer advisories, visit <http://www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/seafood.html>

Fish is not only tasty but also loaded with health benefits when chosen with care and eaten in moderation. It needn't be expensive or difficult to prepare. Try sautéing fish in olive or canola oil, adding pepper, garlic and tomatoes toward the end. Oven-poach fillets in skim milk, adding some bread crumbs, black pepper and Parmesan cheese on the top. Or slap a salmon steak on the grill. Any way you prepare it, fish will benefit your health!