

Eating fish twice a week might help body, brain

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Fat is not necessarily bad for you.

When it's omega-3 fatty acids, the kind found in many kinds of fish, it can help lower blood pressure and prevent heart attack and stroke, according to the American Heart Association. They also say it can decrease the risk of arrhythmia, or irregular heartbeat, which can lead to sudden cardiac death.

The American Heart Association recommends that Americans eat fish at least two times a week. They recommend mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna and salmon. These "fatty fish" provide two kinds of omega-3 fatty acids, eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). They're also a good source of protein and don't have the high saturated fat of some meats.

DHA also might help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease, according to research published last year in the Journal of Neuroscience.

"We tell people to stay away from fats. It sounds like a contradiction in terms," says Diane C. McClune, regional director of marketing for the Greater Pittsburgh American Heart Association.

"But we're finding more and more that physicians are saying, when there's some type of inflammation in the blood vessels, it can lead to plaque build-up, which can lead to heart attack and stroke.

"What they're finding is that people have inflammation on the blood vessels just like you have inflammation on the surface of the skin," she says.

Omega-3 fatty acids help keep blood vessels smooth and elastic, says McClune, a cardiovascular nurse. Omega-3 fatty acids also can help increase high-density lipoproteins, or HDL, the "good" cholesterol. (The "bad" cholesterol is LDL or low-density lipoproteins).

The old saw about fish being good brain food has its basis in fact, she says.

"We know that protein is essential for brain function, as are certain fats. The omega-3 fatty acids help with conduction of the electrical impulses."

The United States is the third-largest consumer of fish and shellfish, behind China and Japan, according to a July report issued by the Fisheries Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. In 2007, Americans consumed about 4.9 billion pounds of seafood, or 4.1 pounds per person.

Joyce Raible, a registered dietician at UPMC St. Margaret's in Pittsburgh near Aspinwall, encourages patients to incorporate seafood into their diets.

"We usually tell people it's something that doesn't take long to prepare," she says. "For someone who's working, fish is something that's easy to fix."

Fish also is low in calories, as long as it's not deep-fried or prepared with other high-saturated fats, Raible says.

Many people aren't sure how to cook fish, Raible says. Others don't like the fishy taste.

These folk might try halibut, cod or talapia, says Howard Darrow, operations chef at McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurant, Southside Works. They have a milder flavour than more robust species such as salmon, swordfish, perch and walleye.

During October, which is National Seafood Month, McCormick & Schmick's two Pittsburgh locations will donate a portion of their sales of heart-healthy menu items to the American Heart Association, Pittsburgh Division.

People who want to cook fish at home shouldn't feel like they're swimming upstream, Darrow says. Most fish recipes are relatively simple to prepare.

"A nice place to start is salmon," he says. "Whether it's farm-raised or wild, salmon is very high in omega-3, very good for the heart. There's so many different ways you can prepare it."

These include poaching, broiling or steaming. It also can be lightly sautéed with canola oil.

"Steaming fish, that's something that very easy to do at home," Darrow says. "You can use your vegetable steamer and keep the fish out of the water and cook the fish with the lid on."

Flavouring fish doesn't require slathering on high-fat tartar sauce.

"You can use Old Bay seasoning. You could season it with lemon grass and lemon zest to get more of a citrusy flavour that would go great with white rice and steamed broccoli or asparagus."

Another option is buying a nice piece of yellowfin tuna and rolling it in Cajun spice, he says.

The American Heart Association also suggests that people can eat tofu and other forms of soybeans, as well as canola, walnuts and flaxseed. Some studies suggest that the alpha-linoleic acid (LNA) in these foods can be converted to omega-3 fatty acid in the body.

Fish-oil supplements are another option, although not as effective, McClune says.

"We recommend people get it in their diet rather than supplements," she says. "That's a more natural way for it to be absorbed into he body."

Spinach-Stuffed Baked Salmon

This recipe is from "Light & Easy Recipes" (Publications International, Ltd, \$3.99) by the American Heart Association. Available [online](#).

1 teaspoon olive oil
2 ounces fresh spinach leaves
1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
1/4 cup chopped roasted red bell peppers, rinsed and drained if bottled
1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, coarsely chopped
2 tablespoons chopped walnuts
Vegetable cooking spray
4 salmon fillets (about 4 ounces each), rinsed and patted dry with paper towels
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons plain dry bread crumbs
1/2 teaspoon dried oregano, crumbled
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat, swirling to coat the bottom. Cook the spinach and lemon zest for 2 minutes or until the spinach is wilted, stirring constantly. Transfer to a medium bowl. Stir in the bell peppers, basil, and walnuts. Let cool for 5 minutes.

Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil. Lightly coat the foil with cooking spray.

Cut a lengthwise slit in the side of each fillet to make a pocket for the stuffing. Be careful to not cut through to the other side. With a spoon or your fingers, carefully stuff a scant 1/2 cup spinach mixture into each fillet. Transfer to the baking sheet. With a pastry brush or spoon, spread the mustard over the fish.

In a small bowl, stir together the remaining ingredients. Sprinkle over the fish. Lightly coat the tops with cooking spray.

Bake for 12 to 13 minutes, or until the fish flakes easily when tested with a fork and the filling is warmed through.

Makes 4 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 208 calories, 9 grams fat, 65 milligrams cholesterol, 27 grams protein, 6 grams carbohydrates, 1 gram dietary fiber

Salmon and Corn Chowder

Here's a tasty way to get those omega-3 fatty acids into your diet.

This recipe is from the American Heart Association's Face The Fats program.

1/2 1 cup brown rice
1/2 8 cups fat-free, low-sodium chicken stock
1/2 1 tablespoon ginger puree
1/2 2 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 1 cup diced onion
1/2 1 cup diced carrots
1/2 1 cup diced celery
1/2 2 cloves garlic, chopped
1/2 1 teaspoon turmeric
1/2 1 teaspoon dried thyme
1/2 1 bay leaf
1/2 2 tablespoons curry powder
1/2 1 teaspoon salt
1/2 2 tablespoons sugar
1/2 3 cups (1 pound) sweet corn (thawed, if using frozen)
1/2 1/4 cup flour
1/2 1 pound salmon, cut into 1-inch cubes
1/2 1/2 cup chopped cilantro
1/2 1/2 cup chopped green onions, green and white parts

Place the rice, stock, and ginger puree in a large saucepan and set over high heat. Boil until the rice is cooked through, about 40 minutes. Remove from stove and set aside.

In a large stockpot over medium-high heat, bring the olive oil to the smoking point. Add the onions, carrots, celery, garlic, turmeric, thyme, bay leaf, curry, salt, sugar, and corn to the pot and sauté for 5 minutes.

Stir in the flour to coat the vegetables. Add the cooked rice and stock to the soup and let it simmer for 5 minutes. Add the salmon and remove the pot from the stove.

Let the soup rest for 5-10 minutes to cook the salmon through. Stir in the chopped cilantro and serve immediately. Garnish with chopped scallions, if desired.

Makes 10 1-cup servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 236 calories, 6 grams fat, 24 grams cholesterol, 15 grams protein, 33 grams carbohydrates, 2 grams dietary fiber

Salmon Sorrento

With its thick, colourful sauce, this dish provides a way to dress up salmon without covering up its natural flavour.

This recipe is from the "American Heart Association Meals in Minutes Cookbook" (Clarkson Potter/Publishers, (\$15.95) by the American Heart Association.

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
5 medium-size Italian plum tomatoes, diced
6 medium-size black olives, coarsely chopped
6 medium-size green olives, coarsely chopped
3 tablespoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons coarsely or finely chopped fresh parsley (Italian, or flat-leaf, preferred)
1 tablespoon capers, rinsed and drained
1 1/2 teaspoons bottled minced garlic or 3 medium-size cloves garlic, thinly sliced
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 pound salmon fillet

Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the oil and swirl to coat the bottom of skillet. Add the tomatoes, black and green olives, lemon juice, parsley, capers, garlic and pepper; stir to mix. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, 2 to 3 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium and cook until the mixture is reduced by about one-third, for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Meanwhile, rinse the salmon and pat dry with paper towels.

Using a spoon, push the reduced sauce to one side and place the salmon in the skillet. Spoon the sauce over the salmon. Cook, covered, over medium heat for 15 to 17 minutes or until the salmon flakes easily when tested with a fork.

Makes 4 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 202 calories, 9 grams fat, 84 milligrams cholesterol, 6 grams carbohydrates, 1 gram dietary fiber