



FISH

Nutritional superfood?

1. Essential fats:

Certain “oily” fish contain high quantities of eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosapentaenoic acid (DHA). These essential (required from the diet) fats are widely acknowledged as:

a) helping to reduce inflammation, thus helping arthritis sufferers and improving cardio-vascular health.

b) assisting brain function and memory (high levels DHA and some EPA can be found in the brain).

2. Mineral rich:

Living and feeding in the sea fish have a diet which is rich in minerals and are therefore believed to be valid dietary sources of zinc, calcium, iron, chromium, magnesium, manganese and selenium.

3. Fresh food:

The “tender” nature of fish flesh means that it is eaten shortly after catching, unlike meat which has to be hung in order to become sufficiently tender to eat.

Observed low incidence of cardio vascular disease amongst the Inuit Norwegians in the latter 20th Century, in spite of a low intake of vegetables paved the way for fish to be become a widely recommended, health promoting “superfood”.

Under the skin:

The fish that arrives on the 21st Century plate is however substantially different from that consumed by the Inuit forty to fifty years ago. Questions need to be asked about whether modern day fish really is necessary or even beneficial for health.

1. Many of the fish we consume are not caught locally. The air (or ship) miles involved in bringing them to our plate have environmental impact, and prevent the fish from being genuinely fresh when it reaches our plate.

2. Transport of any nature usually requires fish to be wrapped in plastic. Retail presentation is often plastic wrapped. The fats in the fish are particularly susceptible to pollution from zeno-oestrogenic (toxic oestrogen like substances) elements found in plastics.

3. Our seas are becoming increasingly polluted and traces of Methyl Mercury, Polychlorinated bi-phenols (PCB's) and Dioxins have all been found in fish.

4. Controlled trials to establish clinical benefits of fish oils use uncooked (raw) fish oils. The fish on our plate is usually cooked and the oils which are considered to be so beneficial for our health are widely accepted as being damaged by light and heat.

5. High demand to acquire the health benefits of marine diets have lead to the use of indiscriminate industrial fishing techniques. These destroy huge swathes of Ocean wildlife, while unwanted (dead) catch are jettisoned back in to the Ocean. Many fish species are threatened with or are becoming extinct.

6. Medication is used in fish farms, the products are frequently dyed and feed is not always marine based.

7. A recent review (April 2006) of research, published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), suggested that omega 3 oils do not in fact increase mortality, improve cardiovascular health or reduce cancer incidence.

The reviewers suggested that fish oils did not actually provide many of it's purported beneficial health effects and citing toxicity from fish as a possible explanation.

So what's the solution?

Dietary omega 3 oils are widely considered to be associated with certain health benefits. Trials where marine lipids or margarines based on their vegetarian precursor were given have however suggested an increased health risk associated with consumption.

In February 2004 consultant psychiatrist Olga Garrard wrote to the BMJ suggesting, pointing out that DHA and EPA can be made in the human body from a fatty acid found in flax oil and hemp oil. She suggested trials of this source of omega 3 oils be carried out. Trials using omega 3 based margarine were included in the recent BMJ review, reporting non-favourable effects. The processes involved in producing margarine are however widely accepted as being damaging to the fats in question.

The solution, I propose, is to use refrigerated, cold pressed organic hemp oil from a glass bottle. This contains high levels of omega 3 and some omega 6 oils. Its consumption does not pose ethical, ecological or, based on emerging evidence, health challenges that consuming marine based lipids would appear to.



You can add it to salads or take tea spoons of it straight from the bottle! Remember to keep it in the fridge. You can buy it from most good health food shops.