

(Web Article)

Fishing for the Skinny on Fatty Acids? ...and Still Confused?

Deepwater fish, coldwater fish, wild fish, farmed fish, big fish, small fish...before we get too Suessian about all the choices, there are really just a few things you really need to know about consuming quality fish oils, either as a delicious meal or a supplement:

1. ***Oily fish have more oil.*** (What a surprise).

If your fish is light and flaky, it may be delightful and refreshing, but it's the denser, oily fish that are suffused with the omega-3 fatty acids your body uses as an anti-inflammatory, a skin and joint lubricant, and a protector of heart muscle cells.

Salmon, tuna, swordfish, sardines, anchovies and their oils are among the stars, and provide up to three times as much omega-3 ounce per ounce as their lighter counterparts. Snapper, tilapia, grouper and other favorites do have more omega-3's than flaxseed and other such foods not in the fish family, but still far less than the oiler varieties.

2. ***Smaller is usually better.***

Sardines, anchovies and other small fish tend to have the lowest levels of toxins. Tuna and swordfish do accumulate higher levels of mercury with age, so if you eat these fish often, go for the "light tuna" (translation: young, small tuna), and cuts from smaller swordfish.

3. ***You don't have to pay through the nose for boutique Norwegian fish oil to get a quality product.***

While the FDA does not strictly regulate the production of fish oil, there are independent testing laboratories such as the IFOS that may put their seal of approval on popular drugstore brands. There are trace amounts of mercury and PCBs in fish oil as in many other products we consume, but fish oil has been under such scrutiny that the industry has utilized an effective distilling process on a widespread basis, and testing of the most popular brands have demonstrated high purity levels.

4. ***More is not always better!***

Vitamin E is part and parcel of fish oil pills, and since it is a fat-soluble vitamin (as opposed to vitamins like C and A that don't accumulate in the body), intake as a supplement should be limited to about 1,500 mgs daily for a 150-pound person.

5. ***Don't sweat the ratios!***

Things really get confusing when you read about the proper ratios of Omega-3s to 6's to 9's and then check your bottle to see what you have. It is optimal to go for the actual fish or fish oil vs. omega supplements and let nature do the math for you.

As this country grew away from direct sources of food through hunting and fishing, we lost some valuable nutrition along the way. Your parents or grandparents may have undergone the distasteful daily experience of having a teaspoon of cod liver oil poured down their throats; even before the science was understood, the benefits of the fatty acids in fish oil were intuitively recognized.

So belly up to your salmon (yes, wild is better) or, for convenience, swallow a frozen (burpless) fish oil pill or two each day to answer your body's call for this timeless health serum!