

Beyond Baked Beans

Cheap healthy food for students,
singles and anyone else on a budget



Which oily fish should you eat? And how much of them? publication date: Jun 16, 2008

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We've all heard that we should be eating more fish especially those classed as "oily" but how much should we be eating and which species count?

Who would have thought that selecting fish for supper would be so complicated? Not only are we bombarded with warnings about sustainability but we're also told to eat certain varieties but not too much of them!

Fish, as we all know, is a healthy source of protein and it supplies valuable nutrients including zinc, selenium and the fat-soluble vitamins A and D. Certain species, typically referred to as "oily", offer additional benefits because they are an important source of essential fatty acids particularly the omega-3 fats, EPA and DHA.

These additional health benefits are relevant to every single one of us and at every stage of our lives. During pregnancy, breast-feeding and as a toddler we need these essential fats for the development of the brain and the retina. As we grow they become important for brain function helping to minimise behavioural problems such as ADHD (attention deficit disorder) and reduce the risk of depression, dementia and even Alzheimer's. They also support the heart and circulatory system and may reduce the likelihood of blood clots and heart attacks.

The fish varieties classed as "oily" include salmon, mackerel, herring, trout and sardines, happily mostly available at a reasonable price. Tuna is also an oily fish but loses much of these important oils during the canning process so ideally it should be eaten fresh to obtain its full nutritional value.

The Food Standards Agency has issued guidelines on the consumption of fish, particularly the oily varieties. This is because fish stocks are unfortunately polluted with chemicals such as PCBs and dioxins. The fatter species tend to absorb a greater level of these chemicals and larger fish such as tuna may also carry an increased risk of mercury toxicity. Women who are or intending to be pregnant are advised to minimise their intake in order to reduce the risk of neural problems in their developing baby.

Advice in this area continues to be subject to some debate with a recent Government inquiry advocating a complete review of current guidelines. Reports investigating the levels of chemicals in fish suggest that wild varieties and some species such as trout may present a lower level of contamination; whilst white fish such as haddock, coley and hake also carry a lower risk.

Without doubt the health benefits of eating fish, especially the oily varieties, are numerous and the best

advice is to eat a wide variety of species. Tinned sardines and mackerel and grilled or baked salmon or trout all make healthy and thrifty meals. (But don't fry them because high temperatures and the added fat compromises the ability of the body to absorb the omega 3 oils). Pickled and smoked fish such as pickled herrings and smoked mackerel also have health benefits but shouldn't be eaten too often because of the high levels of salt they contain.

If you are female and planning a pregnancy it is still important to include fish in your diet but follow the current guidelines for recommended weekly intake below. I'll keep you up to date with any changes to the guidelines as and when they come through.

GUIDELINES

Number of portions (140g) of oily fish per week:

Women of reproductive age and young girls - 2 portions

Women beyond reproduction, men & boys - 4 portions

To find out which fish are regarded as sustainable visit [Fish Online](#)

Kerry Torrens is a practising nutritional therapist. You can contact her via her website www.foodlinkfirst.com

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