

Fish for Your Heart?



Cutting back on red meat is a common recommendation for both health and sustainability. What's less clear is what we should replace the meat with. A recent study looked at this and the results may surprise you.



If not red meat, what?

Red meat appears on many lists of foods to eat less of due mostly to its saturated fat and cholesterol content, and the fact that we tend to eat too much of it. A recent study looked at what we should consider substituting for red meat when we follow the advice to cut back. Of all of the substitutions the study looked at, one stood out as the best choice – fish high in omega-3s. The fatty fish showed more benefits for heart health than poultry, unprocessed meat and even lean fish.



Is fish safe to eat?

Fish, especially the kind that gives us omega-3s, has long been considered a healthy choice. Warnings related to contamination by mercury and other toxins has left many people wondering if fish is safe to eat. For most people, the benefits of eating fish far outweigh the risks. To keep those risks even lower, it is important to choose a variety of fish. Salmon, anchovies, herring, shad, sardines, Pacific oysters, trout, and Atlantic and Pacific mackerel are examples of fish that offer omega-3s and are lower in mercury making them good options for those meat-skipping meals.



Bottom Line

If you are looking to improve your health and that of our environment, replacing red meat with fatty fish occasionally seems like a step in the right direction. Choosing the fish carefully to avoid high levels of mercury, especially for pregnant women and young children is recommended. The Seafood Watch Guide (seafoodwatch.org) can help make sure those fish choices are ocean-friendly too.

REFERENCES:

1. Würtz AMI, Hansen MD1, Tjønneland A2, Rimm EB3, Schmidt EB4, Overvad K1, Jakobsen MJ1. Substitutions of red meat, poultry and fish and risk of myocardial infarction. *Br J Nutr.* 2016 Mar 7:1-8. [Epub ahead of print]
2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2015 – 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. 8th Edition. December 2015. Available at <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>.

Written by Jennifer M. Roberts, MS, RD