

Fish forms part of healthy diet

New research is emerging favouring fish as part of a healthy diet. Fish contains omega-3 long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids, also known as (LC-PUFAs).

The particular omega-3s found in fish are eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Omega-3 fats are essential because they cannot be made by the body and therefore must be provided by food eaten.

There is strong evidence to support the benefit of DHA and EPA in reducing cardiovascular disease. Most importantly for people with diabetes, DHA and EPA lower the blood fat triglycerides, therefore helping to reduce the risk of a heart attack.

This is a significant finding, given that people with diabetes have double the risk of having a heart attack compared to those without diabetes. For people who have had a heart attack, DHA and EPA reduce the risk of another heart attack. These omega-3 fish oils probably also help improve blood clotting, blood pressure and heart rhythm disturbances.

There is also interesting research showing benefits of fish oils in reducing pain and increasing joint flexibility in people with rheumatoid arthritis. Fish oils have also been shown to be successful treatments for depression and preventing age related macular degeneration, including vision loss. Further research is looking into the benefits of fish oils in treating asthma, allergies, Alzheimer’s disease and also reducing post-natal depression.

To achieve the recommended amount of omega-3s through food, a person would need to eat at least two high omega-3 fish meals each week (200-400grams each week).

Excellent source of omega-3 oil	Good source of omega-3 oil
Salmon	Kahawai
Mackerel	Trevally
Tuna	Kingfish
Herring	Warehou
Sardines	Dory
Eel	Snapper
Swordfish	
Trout	

Muttonbird and seafood, including mussels, squid, oysters, prawns, scallops and kina, also contain some omega-3 oils.

While white fish doesn’t have as much omega-3 as oily fish it is still recommended by health professionals as a low-fat choice for at least one meal each week. Fish is an

excellent source of protein, is naturally low in saturated fat and is also a good source of other vitamins and minerals.

Canned fish and fish in soft pouches provide a convenient way of including fish in meals. If the bones are eaten, as in canned fish, then this is also a good source of calcium.

The most common way New Zealanders consume fish is as fish and chips, but because of the large amount of fat in a fish and chip meal it doesn’t contribute to the benefits of a healthy eating plan.

The Heart Foundation recommends people who do not eat fish may benefit from consuming a supplement of marine omega-3 polyunsaturated fats equivalent to 200 mg EPA and DSA daily. It is advisable to discuss this with your doctor before starting.

Some manufacturers are now adding omega-3s to foods as an extra ingredient. Enriched eggs, selected table spreads, milk and bread can also be a useful source of omega-3. Check the food label for details. ●



Four fishy tips

- 1 Have sardines on wholegrain toast once a week.
- 2 Use a thin spread of salmon paste or salmon pate as a spread in place of butter or margarine on wholegrain bread.
- 3 Fish is ideal for barbecuing, microwaving, steaming, grilling and baking.
- 4 The key is not to overcook fish. It only takes a few minutes to cook on each side.

Article by Alison Pask, New Zealand Registered Dietitian, who is working in a newly created role as the community dietitian working across all PHOs in the Porirua Region, Wellington. Her work mainly involves educating people with diabetes.