

Ask a Professional Home Economist

For Immediate Release

Fishing for Omega-3 Fatty Acids

by Astrid Strader, P.H.Ec.

Are you eating enough fish? Health Canada recommends that children (over the age of 2) and adults eat at least two servings of fish weekly. That's a minimum of 75 grams (2.6 oz) or 125 mL (1/2 cup) twice a week. A great source of protein, cold water fish is low in saturated fat and rich in omega-3 fatty acids.

Omega-3s are healthy polyunsaturated fatty acids. A daily supply is essential for energy, metabolism, cardiovascular and immune health. Omega-3s appear to help prevent eczema, arthritis, eye disorders, to reduce inflammation and perhaps even depression. Studies show omega-3s boost early brain development, maintain healthy brain function throughout life and protect against some cancers. "Regular consumption of fish by pregnant women (and those who may become pregnant) plays a role in normal fetal brain and eye development," according to Health Canada. The American Heart Association states "omega-3s decrease the risk of arrhythmias, triglyceride levels, and the rate of atherosclerotic plaques and can slightly lower blood pressure."

Fish is the best natural source of omega-3 fats (DHA and EPA), which are considered superior to plant sources (ALA) because they are more directly and more efficiently absorbed by the body. Yet plant sources are extremely important in our diet. Not everyone likes fish, especially children. Perhaps that explains why 78% of Canadian children are not getting enough omega-3s, according to 2009 research from the University of Guelph.

Best sources of omega-3s are fatty cold water fish and fish oil supplements. Trout, sardines, herring, mackerel and salmon are fatty fish. Leaner fish contain some omega-3s. Plant sources include soy and canola oils, walnuts, ground flaxseed, hempseed nut, and dark leafy green vegetables. Small amounts of omega-3s are found in eggs, while specially marked 'Omega-3 Eggs' contain only marginally more than regular eggs. You should ask your doctor if a fish oil supplement is recommended for you; some people can get too much of a good thing.

Today it is impossible to discuss eating fish without thinking about the environment. Many fish supplies are depleting and mercury is big news. Eating a variety of different kinds of fish is advised to help minimize consumption of potentially harmful environmental pollutants yet still hook the health benefits of omega-3s. Health Canada has revised an assessment of mercury in fish at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca. Check 'Advisories'.

Whenever possible, make your choices from environmentally sustainable supplies of fish. Canada's Seafood Guide is a good reference available at: www.seachoice.org. Environment-conscious Canadians have been surprised to discover that some readily available wild Pacific salmon is labelled 'Product of China'. The fish is caught in the international waters of the North Pacific, transported to China for deboning, skin removal, portioning, then boxed, frozen and shipped to Canada. To leave a smaller carbon footprint, read the label, choose 'local' and consider 'sustainably farmed' fish. Remember, the research is ongoing and information is updated or modified frequently.

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Not a fish eater? The following rainbow trout recipe will change your mind. Here's an easy, delicious dish, seasoned with Indian spices to entice even non-fish eaters to catch their essential omega-3s.

Trout Tikka

Serve with rice or couscous and complete the meal with a salad or green vegetable.
Makes 8 servings.

2 tbsp (30 mL)	canola oil
2	small cooking onions, chopped
3	cloves garlic, minced
2 tbsp (30 mL)	minced peeled fresh ginger
2 tbsp (30 mL)	curry powder
1 tsp (5 mL)	ground cumin
1 tsp (5 mL)	ground coriander
1 can (14 oz/400 mL)	light coconut milk
1 can (19 oz/540 mL)	chick peas, drained and rinsed (preferably garlic-flavoured)
1 cup (250 mL)	fat-free plain yogurt
1/4 cup (50 mL)	chopped cilantro
2 lbs (1 kg)	rainbow trout fillets, fresh or thawed frozen
2 tbsp (30 mL)	lemon-pepper seasoning (or 1 tsp/5 mL coarse ground pepper and zest of 1 lemon)

1. Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat; add onions and sauté until glassy looking. Add garlic and ginger and sauté for 1 minute. Add curry powder, cumin and coriander and sauté for 1 minute.
2. Add coconut milk, chick peas and yogurt and bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally until flavours have blended. *Sauce can be made a day ahead up to this point. Cool, cover and refrigerate. Bring to boil in a saucepan before serving. Add cilantro at end.*
3. Meanwhile, rinse fish fillets and pat dry. Sprinkle with lemon-pepper seasoning and place skin side down on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
4. Bake in preheated 375°F (190°C) oven for about 10 minutes or until fish starts to flake with a fork. (Generally, the cooking rule is 10 minutes per inch/2.5 cm of fish thickness). Alternatively, place fillets directly on preheated barbecue grill over medium heat. When you lift the fish off the paper or grill, slide your spatula just between the meat and the skin and lift off without the skin. Serve tikka sauce over fish.

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The Ontario Home Economics Association, a self-regulated body of Professional Home Economists, promotes high professional standards among its members so that they may assist families and individuals to achieve and maintain a desirable quality of life.

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