



# To Our Health

Səkəlamálsəwəkan

(Zur-g'la-mal-s'wur-gan)



## Salmon: To Eat or Not to Eat?

The American Heart Association recommends eating fatty fish at least two times a week for heart health, because they have high levels of omega-3 fatty acids. While salmon is the best source of omega-3 fatty acids, sardines, mackerel, herring, and rainbow trout have high amounts as well. Other fish like albacore tuna, pollock, sole, and halibut are good sources. They can help heart health in many ways, including improving the fats in the blood, slowing the growth of plaques, reducing inflammation and clotting, and helping cholesterol medications work better. All these actions help prevent heart attacks and strokes.

If salmon is so good for you, why is there some controversy about eating salmon? That is because much of the salmon that is available for consumers is farmed salmon. Although the image of "farmed" sounds like it should be healthier, farmed salmon actually has higher levels of contaminants than its cousins, wild salmon. Farmed salmon are fed fish and oil that may be contaminated with mercury, PCB's, dioxins, and pesticides. Salmon farmed in Maine were compared to international farmed salmon (Scotland, Eastern Canada, Norway, Washington State, and Chile, among other places) and also to wild salmon. Wild salmon, especially Alaskan chum and pink salmon had the lowest levels of contaminants. Washington State and Chilean farmed salmon fared slightly better than Maine and Eastern Canadian farmed salmon.

The risk from eating farmed salmon is quite small, and varies for different populations. Children, pregnant and nursing women, and women who might get pregnant are especially at risk when consuming these

contaminants, and should avoid eating farmed salmon. However, they usually have a low risk of having heart disease. At risk for getting heart disease are middle-aged men and women after the onset of menopause. The studies that have been done on these at-risk populations clearly show that the benefits of eating salmon in moderation far outweigh the risks. An example is that if 100,000 people ate farmed



salmon once a week until age 80, 8 of those people might get cancer, but 1,500 fewer of them would die of a sudden heart attack, than those who did not eat salmon.

The contaminants are mostly in the fat of the fish. You can make it safer to eat by scoring the flesh (cut in several places) before cooking, grilling or broiling the fish, and removing the skin before you eat it, to decrease the fat that is eaten. If you use those cooking methods, the EPA recommends a maximum of 1 serving

every month of Maine or Eastern Canadian farmed salmon, or 2 servings a month of farmed salmon from Washington State or Chile. The top limits for wild and canned salmon are higher, but vary by type of salmon, from 2 servings a month for Alaskan Chinook to 8 or more servings a month for chum salmon.

There is another kind of omega-3 fatty acid that is found in vegetable sources,

### What should I do?

- ♦ **Children, pregnant and nursing women, and women who might get pregnant should not eat farmed salmon.**
- ♦ **If you are a middle-aged man or woman past menopause, eat farmed salmon in moderate amounts.**
- ♦ **If eating salmon, score the flesh before you cook, broil or grill the fish, and remove the skin before eating.**
- ♦ **Choose a wide variety of fish and seafood, including wild or canned wild salmon.**
- ♦ **Eat vegetable sources of omega-3 fatty acids.**

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such as soybeans, canola oil, walnuts, and flaxseeds. This type is not as strong or as effective as fish oils. Researchers are not as sure of the benefits of this type of omega-3 fatty acid, but still encourage people to eat these food sources.

If you have questions or want articles about omega-3 fatty acids or salmon, call Madeleine Martin, at 817-7426.