

Fishing for health

Hippocrates did say “Let food be thy medicine” after all.

Fish contains health protective omega-3 fats (DHA, EPA) that reduce the risk of inflammatory diseases. Conditions like heart disease, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, IBS and atrial fibrillation.

BENEFITS OF EATING FISH

For athletes, there’s no doubt that fish is an excellent source of lean protein used for building muscles and repairing tissue.

A 170g serving of fish provides around 40g of protein – a hefty chunk of the daily 75 to 135 grams of protein needed for a 68kg athlete.

The protein in fish is among the most healthful animal sources of protein. That’s because fish is low in saturated fat – the kind associated with heart disease. When you eat fish, you are also not eating artery-clogging spare ribs, greasy hamburgers and cheesy pasta meals.

Unlike the ‘bad’ saturated fat in beef and cheese that is hard at room temperature, the ‘good’ polyunsaturated omega-3 fats (called EPA and DHA) are so soft, they are liquid. This oil allows fish to stay flexible, unlike beef lard, and be able to swim despite living in cold ocean waters and mountain streams.

Omega-3 fish oil makes human blood less likely to form clots that cause heart attacks and strokes.

Omega-3s have a beneficial effect of the electrical systems of the heart; this protects against irregular heartbeats that can cause sudden death. Omega-3s also reduce triglyceride levels.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend eating one to two fish meals per week, particularly oily fish. For people who dislike eating fish, fish oil supplements are another option.

FISH RISKS: MERCURY AND PCBS

Eating fish does come with risks related to mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls. However, the American Journal of Preventative Medicine has published studies from the Harvard Centre for Risk Analysis.

It’s generally accepted that the benefits of consuming fish far outweigh the risks. Children and adults who don’t eat fish tend to be more likely to suffer a stroke or heart attack.

The trick to eating fish is to eat it in moderation and to consume a variety of different fish, with a particular focus on the smaller fish. Each week, enjoy a meal with oily fish and another with low-mercury fish (snapper, whiting, mullet). Be moderate, and you’ll get hooked with good health.