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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Fish packs nutritional punch for children, pregnant women

Make room for fish on your weekly menu: The nutritional value of fish makes it important for a baby's growth and development before birth, in early infancy for breastfed infants, and in childhood. Fish also is recommended for pregnant and breastfeeding women and those who may become pregnant.



These groups should eat two to three servings a week of fish or seafood that is low in mercury, according to the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency. Adults should eat a total of 8 to 12 ounces of a variety of fish a week, with smaller portions for children.

Why is fish so healthy? It contains high-quality protein, vitamins, minerals, omega-3 fatty acids and sometimes vitamin D. Omega-3s are essential for the developing brain and nervous system, but supplements may not provide the full beneficial effect. Fish also has many benefits for adults, helping to reduce the risk of heart disease and other conditions.

There is concern about eating fish that contain high levels of mercury, which can be harmful to the brain and nervous system if a person is exposed to too much of it. Fish high in mercury include swordfish, tilefish from the Gulf of Mexico, shark and king mackerel. Limit white (albacore) tuna to 6 ounces (one meal) a week. In addition, consider limiting orange roughy and marlin.

Families eating fish caught from local streams, rivers and lakes should follow fish advisories from local authorities. If those are not available, limit local fish consumption to 6 ounces a week (1-3 ounces for children) and eat no other fish that week.

Lower-mercury fish include salmon, shrimp, pollock, tilapia, catfish and canned light tuna (mercury levels in this type of tuna can vary). But there is a big difference in the nutritional content of lower-mercury fish. Among the most nutritious of fish low in mercury are salmon, as well as herring, trout, anchovies, sardines, shad, pollock (Atlantic or Walleye), mussels and mackerel (Atlantic or Pacific).

Some people may have stopped eating fish because of concern over contaminants like PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). But nutrition experts say the benefits of eating fish outweigh the possible risks. Varying the type of fish eaten is the best approach, and both fresh and frozen are good choices.

For consumer tips on safe seafood handling, check out <http://bit.ly/1xblJEL>.

—Alyson Sulaski Wyckoff

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