

Fish Oil Capsules Are as Good as Fish

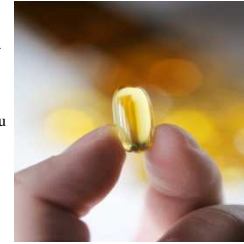
New findings indicate that fish oil capsules and fatty fish do an equally good job of enriching the body with healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

For the study, 11 women ate two servings of tuna or salmon each week, while an additional 12 women took in the same amount of omega-3s in capsule form. After 16 weeks, the amount of omega-3 fatty acids in the red blood cells of women in both groups had risen by 40 percent to 50 percent.

The researchers began the project assuming that fish would be better, but, according to the lead researcher, found instead that “whether you get your omega 3 fatty acids from a concentrate in a capsule or in fish ... they have the same effect on enriching the tissues with omega 3.”

Sources:

- Reuters December 28, 2007
- American Journal of Clinical Nutrition December 2007; 86(6):1621-5



Comment from USA health expert:

The average American diet is seriously deficient in these essential omega 3's. Except for certain types of fish, there are very few sources of these vitally important fats. Unfortunately, what these studies don't take into consideration is the sad fact that so much of our fish supply is grossly contaminated, and therefore completely counteracts any inherent benefits of the fish.

It would have been quite interesting to see these women's mercury levels in addition to their omega-3 serum levels. If heavy metal contamination had been taken into account, the final conclusion would most likely have been that omega-3 supplements are in fact far **superior** to fish – especially tuna!

Are You Loading Up on Mercury or Omega-3?

The world's oceans are so polluted with industrial waste that most commercially available fish have become significantly polluted with many toxins – especially mercury – throughout all the fat and tissues of their bodies. This shouldn't come as a surprise, considering the fact that some **40 tons** of mercury are released in the United States alone, every year, due to burning coal to generate electricity.

The most common contaminants found in fish include:

- Mercury
- PCBs
- Radioactive substances like strontium
- Toxic metals such as cadmium, lead, chromium and arsenic

Smaller fish, such as herring, sardines, and anchovies fare better than larger fish since they don't have time to accumulate much mercury in their tissues. The highest concentrations are found in the large carnivorous fish of the ocean.

These are some of the ones you should definitely avoid, especially if you are pregnant, or trying to become pregnant:

Tuna steaks	Canned tuna
Sea bass	Oysters (Gulf of Mexico)
Marlin	Halibut
Pike	Walleye
White croaker	Largemouth bass
Shark	Swordfish

GotMercury.org is a good website if you're curious to see just how high your intake of mercury might be. Not only do they have a handy mercury calculator, but they also perform independent testing on various sources of fish.

For example, if you're a sushi lover and happen to live in the Chicago area like me, you may want to take a look at their [Mercury Contamination in Chicago Tuna Sushi Report](#). After testing mercury concentrations in tuna sushi samples from ten high-rated Chicago sushi restaurants, the results were less than encouraging:

- The mean concentration of all 20 samples was 0.445 ppm (parts per million) total mercury – very close to the 0.5 legal limit in Canada and the EU
- 70 percent exceeded the Illinois Environmental Protection agency's (IEPA) special advisory threshold for methylmercury. At that level, women of childbearing age and children are advised to eat no more than one serving per month
- 14 percent had a concentration higher than 0.730 ppm – a level that no women or children should ever consume
- 10 percent of the tuna samples were unsafe for all consumers, because they contained mercury levels above 1.0 ppm, which is the legal action limit for fish sold in the U.S.

Also be especially cautious of canned tuna if you're interested in keeping yourself and your children safe from mercury contamination.

Most canned tuna is labeled either “albacore” or “chunk light.” According to FDA data, albacore (white) tuna contains three times more mercury than chunk light (0.353 ppm vs. 0.118 ppm). However, independent testing by the [Mercury Policy Project](#) found that the average mercury concentration in albacore canned tuna actually exceeded 0.5 ppm.

It's often difficult to make practical use of these numbers, so to give you a better idea of the level of danger, consider this:

- A 22 pound toddler who eats just 2 ounces of tuna per week with a 0.5 ppm mercury concentration would exceed the EPA's “virtual safe limit” by 400 percent
- A 132 pound woman who eats 12 ounces of tuna per week with a 0.5 ppm mercury concentration would also exceed the EPA's limit by 400 percent
- An 88 pound child who eats 6 ounces of tuna per week with a 0.5 ppm mercury concentration would exceed the limit by 300 percent

Is Farm-Raised Fish a Healthier Choice?

Unfortunately, the answer is no. In farmed fish, you not only have the problem of mercury, but also higher PCBs, another poisonous industrial byproduct. Residues in farm-raised fish can be as much as 9 million times the amount found in the water.

If you eat fish in a restaurant, it most likely came from a fish farm. Almost half of the salmon, 40 percent of the haddock, and 65 percent of the freshwater fish consumed today are raised in fish farms. What you may not know is that in order to be profitable, fish farms must raise large quantities of fish in confined areas, and the overcrowding leads to disease and injuries to the fish. The fish are therefore given antibiotics and chemicals for the parasites like sea lice, skin and gill infections and other diseases that commonly affect them.

Making matters worse, these fish are also given drugs and hormones, and sometimes are genetically modified, to accelerate growth and change reproductive behaviours. Farmed salmon are also given the chemicals canthaxanthin and astaxanthin to turn their flesh pink. Wild salmon eat a diet of shrimp and krill, which contain natural chemicals that make the salmon pink. Farm-raised salmon do not eat a natural diet, so their flesh would be gray if they were not given these additives.
