

Real Foods That Heal



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Sardines, a plentiful supply of protection

Being a well-informed and health-conscious eater, you certainly are aware now that increasing our dietary intake of omega-3 fatty acids is an essential health strategy. The typical American diet has a very high omega 6 to omega 3 ratio, and bringing that ratio lower will reduce risk of many chronic diseases. We can do that by reducing vegetable cooking oils (corn oil, safflower, peanut oil, and soy oils used in baked goods especially) and increasing intake of oily cold water fish. Wild Alaskan salmon is still one of your best choices, but what if you get tired of salmon, or you are in a hurry? I promised you in February (bulletin 7) that I would talk about sardines, so here it is! Sardines are the fast food of the omega-3 fish world... open the can and you are ready to enjoy. But first, some details on why this is such a good option.

One can of sardines (usually 4 ounces, or about 120 grams) has close to 2000 mg (2 grams) of omega 3 fatty acids, and ounce for ounce is close to salmon in omega 3 content. About half of this is DHA, and roughly 1/3 is EPA. Both DHA and EPA are essential fatty acids, meaning that humans cannot manufacture these, we have to ingest them. The scientific literature is full of studies showing that higher levels of these healthy fats is associated with lower rates of chronic diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, heart disease, ulcerative colitis, and even psoriasis. Solid science also links higher levels of these omega-3 oils to reduced risk of cancers, including colon, prostate and breast cancer. An extremely technical paper in *Biomedicine and Pharmacotherapy* (2002) reviewed the chemistry and how this works in your body. A class of enzymes called cyclooxygenases (COX for short) is involved in producing inflammatory compounds in the body called prostaglandins. There are 2 types of COX, and COX-2 is the one most involved in pain and inflammation, but it also creates a tissue environment promoting tumor growth. High levels of COX-2 activity are found in breast and colon tumors. And DHA (that good fat found in fish) down-regulates the activity of COX-2 in tissues. So I believe the evidence is overwhelmingly pointing to an important role for oily fish consumption in the prevention of cancer, both from population studies (see bulletin 7) and from the laboratory.

Another reason to love sardines is that they are wild-caught, not in any danger of depletion from the oceans (they are rapid breeders) and they are extremely low in contaminants, so can be eaten without fear of mercury or other chemicals. The Environmental Defense Fund ranks Pacific sardines as one of its top Eco-friendly fish.

To get to know and love this marine treat, you will probably want to experiment with different brands and types. Bones versus no-bones, packed in olive oil, tomato sauce or water, you will decide your preference. Your own creativity and taste will be your best guide to enjoyment, so I will keep my serving suggestion simple.

Sardines with salsa

Open a can of sardines, lay them out with a fork onto whole wheat or multi-grain crackers, and smother with organic tomato salsa. If you enjoy hot and spicy, sprinkle a little hot pepper sauce (like Tabasco) over the top. This makes a great lunch, and is complemented by some cool fruit for dessert. And if you are not very hungry, share the last sardine in the can with your cat or dog... they will thank you for it and gain the health benefits too!

Finally, even if you have sent it before, please send this bulletin on to 5 friends and encourage them to subscribe so as not to miss one; everyone deserves to know how to reduce their cancer risk by food choices. The link below is quick!

To your health,

Robert Pendergrast, M.D.

www.realfoodsthatheal.com

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