

Real Foods That Heal



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Atlantic Mackerel: excellent brain food

This week, the Real Foods that Heal bulletin begins coverage of how food choices can reduce the risk mental illness, including dementia and Alzheimer's disease. During my childhood, I recall hearing that fish was "brain food." In those days this information would have been classified as legend or folk tale. But contemporary science has confirmed in many ways that this is true. So what better way to open a discussion on nutritional prevention of brain disease than to discuss an excellent fish choice. It is also an opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings around choices of fish with regard to ecological impact and mercury contamination.

You know by now that I believe that prevention is possible, and I believe we have reason to be optimistic that food choices are an integral part of healthy aging. This bulletin has consistently communicated for the past 6 months that cancer, and especially breast cancer is not a matter of fate or bad luck, and that dietary strategies DO decrease risk. A review of recent research shows that the same is true for prevention of Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia. No prevention strategy is 100% effective, nor are there any guarantees, but evidence is building that food choices matter. And unlike pharmaceutical drugs, the risks of healthy eating are imperceptible, so it takes only a small bit of evidence to tip the balance in favor of a good food choice. So, knowing all its other health benefits, can fish lower risk of Alzheimer's disease?

A 2003 study in the journal Archives of Neurology looked at over 800 older residents of Chicago, and found that the more fish they ate, the less likely they would develop Alzheimer's over the 4 years of the study. They concluded that increased omega-3 fatty acid intake directly lowered Alzheimer's risk. Other studies have reached similar conclusions. So if you are not fond of fish, I recommend a daily fish oil supplement of 1-2 grams daily. And if you enjoy fish (except for the few yccchh's I heard about sardines a few weeks ago!), let me recommend an excellent choice. Atlantic Mackerel (AKA Boston Mackerel or Common Mackerel) is a very good fish choice for several reasons. A small 3 ounce serving of this delicious fish contains 2.5 grams of omega 3 fats. It is not farmed, not an endangered species, and has no significant levels of mercury or other contaminants. This relatively small fish lives in the cold waters of the North Atlantic. Its larger predatory cousin the King Mackerel prefers warm coastal waters and should not be eaten at all by women or children because of mercury contamination (and also has a much lower omega 3 content). Spanish mackerel is also to be avoided because of mercury.

You have already heard about the benefits of salmon and sardines, and now you have a new fish to enjoy. I recommend 2 servings per week of this or some fish. It is an excellent protein source, low in saturated fat and high in the omega-3 fats which you know now can reduce your chances of Alzheimer's disease. Go fish!

Broiled Mackerel with Ginger and Garlic

This delicious recipe adapted from Gourmet magazine in February 2005 is not only a great way to enjoy the health benefits of fish, but it also features three of my favorite spices with great health benefits (turmeric, ginger, garlic).

Place 4 Atlantic mackerel fillets (skin side down) into a baking pan oiled with olive oil. Use food processor to mince 2 tbsp fresh garlic and 2 tbsp fresh ginger, then stir this together with 2 tbsp lime juice, 1 tbsp olive oil, ½ tsp salt, 1 tsp chili powder, and 1 tsp turmeric; rub mixture into fish and marinate 10 minutes. Place baking pan under a preheated broiler, broiling 7-8 minutes 6 inches from the heat without turning; it should be lightly browned and cooked through. Serve with garnish of cilantro and lime wedges.

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 disease risk by food choices. The link below is quick!

To your health,

Robert Pendergrast, M.D.

www.realfoodsthatheal.com

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