

Sustainable Seafood MARIANNE PETERS

I did not eat much seafood as a kid—unless you count fish sticks, canned tuna, or a deep-fried wall-eye sandwich at the Indiana State Fair. In Sunday school, when Jesus blessed the loaves and the fishes, I figured they were large-mouth bass.

We are more health conscious now, so my family eats fish more frequently. What's not to like? It's tasty, low in calories, full of protein, and simple to prepare. I've got Harvard on my side too. The American Heart Association and the Harvard School of Public Health both suggest eating at least two servings of fish per week, ideally of fatty fish such as salmon, herring, mackerel, or sardines—cold-water fish that contain those omega-3 fats everyone is raving about.

Omega-3 fats have been shown to lower blood pressure, help the heart maintain a steady rhythm, reduce inflammation, and lower triglycerides in the blood. They also help with brain and vision development in infants whose mothers ate an omega-3 rich diet. According to a recent article in the *Washington Post*, some studies suggest omega-3s might slow Alzheimer's disease, reduce depression, and protect against cancer, though these findings are not conclusive.

There are two caveats when it comes to consuming fish, however. Poor management and harmful harvesting methods threaten some populations. Without careful management, some species could disappear. For instance, the long-lived orange roughy matures much more slowly than the mahi mahi, which grows quickly and

produces offspring quickly too. If overfished, orange roughy populations recover slowly, and none of the sources I checked recommended eating it. Some methods of harvesting fish damage the ocean floor. In attempting to make a big haul, ships' long lines and huge nets pull in by-catch, unintended passengers such as sea turtles, dolphins, and sharks.

Another caveat to eating some types of fish is the harmful levels of mercury and other toxins such as PCBs and pesticides found in their muscles and fatty tissue. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration advises that pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children avoid eating shark, swordfish, king mackerel, or tilefish, as well as limit albacore tuna to six ounces a week (chunk light tuna is less likely to have high mercury levels). Farmed fish can also have higher levels of toxins than their wild-caught counterparts because they have extra fatty tissue and consume feed that contains other fish containing toxins.

Sorting out which fish is healthiest to eat and which species are plentiful enough to consume sustainably is the dilemma. Packaging labels for fish are not regulated, though consumer demand for healthy fish is driving some producers to list the origin and method of catch on their packaging.

Consulting a guide helps consumers choose carefully. The Blue Ocean Institute and the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch both have lists available on their websites that guide shoppers to fish that are plentiful, healthy, and managed in a sustainable

manner. Monterey Bay Aquarium even has a handy iPhone app with recommendations by species. Ask about the fish at your supermarket—it helps raise food managers' awareness that their customers want that information.

I look for good seafood the same way I look for beef or chicken. I find a dependable local source, or I order frozen seafood through a natural foods co-op. Sometimes I can find good seafood at my supermarket, and most of the time (but not always) it's labeled "wild caught" or "farmed" with the country of origin listed.

As with anything we consume, it's important to consider the impact our eating habits have on the planet. Eating seafood in a sustainable way means we get to keep enjoying its benefits, and we can help keep our oceans healthy too. ■

Extra Resources

blueocean.org

Blue Ocean Institute's website has a fish list by species, information about the state of the oceans, as well as beautiful oceanic artwork and poetry.

www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx

Monterey Bay Aquarium posts a seafood watch list on their website. It's also available as an iPhone app.

www.foodsafety.gov/blog/gulf_seafood.html

FoodSafety.gov offers information about eating seafood from the Gulf of Mexico post-oil spill.

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