

Low seafood consumption is a serious public health issue

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The media often covers the benefits and risks of eating seafood, but unfortunately the “risks” tend to overshadow the “benefits.” This is likely one of the reasons Americans are eating less seafood, as evidenced by the 14.4 pounds per capita seafood consumption in 2012 as reported by NOAA. If we all followed the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans, then we should be consuming 26 pounds per capita of seafood per year.

The fact is not eating enough seafood is a public health issue that needs urgent awareness.

We need to put risks in perspective. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the #1 killer in the United States is heart disease, taking about 600,000 lives every year. In comparison, the CDC has analyzed the number of deaths from foodborne illnesses from 1998 to 2008, resulting in about 1,451 deaths per year. The food categories in this figure include: 278 from poultry, 240 from vegetables, 140 from red meat, 140 from dairy, 93 from fruits and nuts, 71 from fish, and 23 from shellfish.

The body of science on the health benefits of Omega-3 eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) has grown substantially, and the best source for EPA and DHA is seafood. The Global Organization for EPA and DHA Omega-3 (GOED) states that since the 1970s there has been over 20,000 research studies on the essential benefits of EPA and DHA on human health. In simple terms EPA supports heart health and DHA supports brain and eye health.

In research studies it's been observed in human trials that eating seafood twice a



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week has been shown to reduce the risks of dying from heart disease by 36%. If we were able to reduce the number of heart disease deaths by 1/3 then that would mean saving about 200,000 lives in the U.S. each year.

The American Heart Association's (AHA) Impact Goal by 2020 is “to improve the cardiovascular health of all Americans by 20 percent, while reducing deaths from cardiovascular diseases and stroke by 20 percent.” To help achieve this goal AHA has developed suggested habits called “Life’s Simple 7.” One of the 7 simple habits is to eat healthy including fish twice a week. A 2012 AHA update report found that only 1 in 5 American adults and 1 in 10 American children eat fish twice a week. This consumption data is from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES).

Another way to assess low seafood consumption is our intake of EPA and

DHA. Prominent health organizations recommend 250-500mg of Omega-3s EPA+DHA per day. NHANES shows that the average intake for Americans is 90mg of Omega-3s EPA+DHA per day, and it is even lower for children.

The bottom line is that our diets impact our health more than any other action in our daily lives. We all know how hard it is to develop a new habit, but sometimes it just takes one thing to get us started on the right track. One easy thing that we can do to jumpstart a healthy life is to eat seafood twice a week.

ABOUT SEAFOOD NUTRITION PARTNERSHIP

Seafood Nutrition Partnership is a nonprofit with a mission to inspire a healthier America through partnerships that raise awareness about the essential nutritional benefits of eating seafood. www.seafoodnutrition.org **UB**