

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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Fish oil - good for your heart, right? Fish oil - good for your brain, right? There are suggestions that fish oil might help everything from arthritis and cancer to Alzheimer's disease and depression. That's what we hear from all sides. Then why was there an article recently in the paper saying fish oil raises cholesterol? Because - all these statements have some truth in them.

The American Heart Association agrees that fish oil, or some ingredients in fish oil, do help to reduce the levels of triglycerides in our blood. They do help to keep our heart beating regularly. They help lower blood pressure. And they slow down how fast cholesterol accumulates as plaque in our arteries. There are good scientific, medical studies that found good results for all of these.

But some studies have also found that something in fish oil will cause at least some of us to make more LDL cholesterol, the 'bad' kind. The amount of increase in LDL cholesterol was very small, only about 5 to 10%. That's not significant for most people, but could be for others. Very high doses of fish oil, more than 3 grams a day, can also cause excessive bleeding. No one should be taking that much unless they are being checked regularly by a doctor who knows how much they're taking. These are not good results for most of us.

So where is the balance here? What should most of us be doing? The first and foremost recommendation by AHA is that we should eat 2 or more servings of fatty fish a week. The fatty fish that have the most healthful, omega-3 fats are salmon, mackerel,

lake trout, herring, sardines and albacore tuna. Getting the fish oils we need in these foods will not overdose us. Getting our omega-3s as food allows our bodies to absorb what is needed along with the other nutrients of the fish. When we take a concentrated dose in a capsule we can override our natural absorption controls.

But we all know that many of us would rather pop a couple of pills rather than eat a balanced, healthy diet. Lots of people just don't like fish! And of course the supplement industry is more than happy to oblige us by selling this, that and another nutrient in a pill, potion or capsule. So we buy our bottles of fish oil capsules and think we're doing ourselves some good.

But if we'd read further, the AHA goes on to say that only people who should be taking fish oil capsules are those with triglyceride (TG) levels over 500 mg/dl or who've had a heart attack or angina. Fish oil does lower TGs, and some people probably can't get enough through food alone. Fish oil can help prevent more plaque from clogging arteries. For these people the benefit of lower TG levels is worth the risk of a slight increase in cholesterol. For those who don't have such high TGs the benefits will be much less.

If you think fish oil capsules might help you, talk to your doctor first. Find out what the balance of your risks vs benefits would be. Decide together if, and how much, fish oil you need. There are prescription doses and over the counter brands. Not all packages that say 'fish oil' have the same thing inside. Some may carry contaminants, others may be more dilute. Be sure you choose one that has both EPA and DHA, the two most active omega-3 fats. The vegetable sources of omega-3s, tofu, walnuts and flaxseed have a different omega-3, ALA. It's good for us too, but not as effective for

heart health.

If you're not ready for pickled herring, and mackerel soup pushes you away from the table, try a salmon burger. These use canned salmon, but you can use the fish in the foil pouches, or leftover cooked salmon. For more flavor use the foil pouch fish that is all ready flavored, teriyaki or others. Serve with potato salad for summer health.

### Salmon Burgers

1 can (16 oz) canned salmon

1 small onion, grated

2 Tbsp minced fresh parsley

2 eggs, beaten

1 cup fine dry bread crumbs

4 Tbsp oatmeal, quick or regular

Oil or margarine to fry

dash of pepper, Tabasco optional

Put salmon in large mixing bowl. Use a fork to break up pieces and mash any bones.

Mix in onion, parsley, pepper and/or Tabasco. Stir in beaten eggs. Add oatmeal and enough bread crumbs to thicken so that it sticks together. Form into 12 small balls then flatten into burgers. Heat oil or margarine in skillet and fry over low heat until browned.

Turn over and continue cooking until browned on other side. Serve on whole wheat bun with tomato slices and lettuce, or ketchup and pickle relish. Serves 6.