

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Salmon for the Holidays?

It seems there are a lot of families moving away from the traditional turkey or ham for the holidays. Some are choosing salmon instead. A whole salmon baked to perfection can be an impressive dish on the holiday table. Even if it's just an appetizer, smoked salmon adds a lot of appeal to your festive table. It might be more like what the original pilgrims had for their holiday meals. And from what we know now, it might be a much healthier way to start the New Year. But with all the different kinds of salmon available, which is the best choice, what's the safest, and how do we decide?

First, can we really trust the label when it says 'wild caught from Alaska'? The short answer is Yes. What is on the label is legally required to be accurate. There are penalties if it's not. It has to say what country it came from. If the label says it is a product of 2 different countries that means it was caught in one but processed in another. The label also has to tell you if the fish was caught in the wild or raised in a pen.

The best choice is basically up to us to decide. Some people prefer the darkest pink ones, others like the lighter colored fish. There's not a huge difference. In general, the darker red ones like Sockeye have more of the pigments that could help protect our eyesight and brain function. But when you look at other nutrients, there's no clear winner.

For example, King/Chinook salmon has the most omega-3 fats. These are the ones that help protect our hearts. King salmon has 1700 mg in a 3 ounce serving,

followed by Pink with 1300 mg and then Red/Sockeye with 1200 mg. Chum or Keta salmon has the least, only 800 mg. But compared to a fast food fish sandwich at 400 mg, that's still much better!

If you look at other nutrients the picture gets even more clouded. King/Chinook has the most total fat, over three times as much as Coho or Pink salmon has. And Chum/Keta has the most cholesterol at 95 mg and Coho has the least at 55 mg. But fresh Pink salmon has more sodium – 85 mg – than fresh King with 60 mg. Canned salmon has a lot more sodium, a lot! Pink averages 400 mg and Red/Sockeye has 360 mg. Read the label to see how much the canned type you use has.

Mentioning canned salmon brings up another question. You might have heard that some salmon is colored to make it look better. Colors are not added to fish in the can. Wild-caught salmon don't need coloring. They get their colors from the food that they catch. But fish that are raised in huge pens in the ocean can't go swimming to find the kind of food they normally eat. They're fed fish chow to keep them healthy and growing.

If you fed them the same food you give your guppy in the fish tank, the salmon would be very pale, like other fish. So fish farmers add vegetable pigments to the fish food. The colors are similar to the carotene that makes carrots orange. They can come from yeast, algae or be synthetic. It's the same as egg farmers adding marigold petals to the chicken feed to get darker yellow yolks in their eggs. Or the folks at the zoo adding pigments to the food to keep flamingos and spoonbills in their bright pink colors. The fish need the pigments the same way we need carotene to make vitamin A. They're added as much for us as they are for the fish. If colors were added to the feed,

it must say on the label.

Here's a dish to impress your holiday guests. You don't need to tell them how healthy it is. It uses canned salmon instead of the pricy smoked salmon, so it's easy on the pocketbook too. Enjoy!

Smoky Salmon Cheese Ball

2 6-oz cans pink salmon, drained

2 Tbsp minced onion

8 oz reduced fat cream cheese, softened

1 Tbsp parsley flakes

1 Tbsp lemon juice

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp celery salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp liquid smoke

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp garlic powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup pecans, finely chopped

2 Tbsp minced fresh parsley

Remove bones and skin from fish. Combine salmon, cheese and seasonings in bowl and mix well. Cover and chill for at least 1 hour. Shape mixture into a ball, or into a fish shape. Combine chopped nuts and parsley in bowl. Roll ball in nut mixture, or pat it into the sides of fish shape. Serve with assorted party crackers. Makes 12 1-oz servings.