

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Eat what the Fish Eat?

So, if you don't like to eat fish, no matter what the health experts say, could you eat what the fish eat and get the same benefits? That seems to be the idea behind one of the hot items on the supplement counters these days - krill oil. The TV star doctors have endorsed it so it must be good, right? The internet doctors are pushing it, even better!

Krill are microscopic animals in sea water. They look like super miniature shrimp. They eat algae in the sea. Little fishes eat them, bigger fish eat the little ones, and on up the chain. Some whales eat the krill directly, so they are definitely nutritious. The algae, the krill themselves and the fish all produce omega-3 fats, the 'good' fats for our hearts. Mostly we eat the big fish. But some people don't like the taste of fish, or the smell.

So now the supplement industry is harvesting the krill directly from the sea and extracting the oil. We can buy it as liquid, in regular capsules, or in enteric-coated capsules. Those are the ones that don't dissolve until they've gone through your stomach and are in your intestines. They're supposed to help prevent the fish-burps that some people get. It's when you can taste the fish in your mouth even though you didn't eat fish.

The benefit of any fish oil, including krill oil, is the omega-3 fats EPA and DHA. They're good for babies' developing brains and nervous systems. Fish oil containing these fats may well help reduce certain types of cancers. It may reduce the risk of strokes in people who are at high risk. It seems to help prevent the eye disease known as age-related macular degeneration, common in the elderly. It might help manage depression and other psychiatric disorders, as well as stress and anxiety. There's promise in using fish oil, especially EPA and DHA, to slow Alzheimer's disease and mental decline in the elderly. It could protect against the effects of air pollution in the lungs. It's being promoted to help with arthritis, asthma, cystic fibrosis and osteoporosis. But it is mostly 'may', 'might' and 'could'. Very, very little of this is definite.

So, we really should run out and buy krill oil? Not quite. Almost all the studies, and there are plenty, show more benefit in those people who ate fish than in those who just popped the pills.

There's little evidence that supplements help, even with cardiovascular disease. But eating fish does help. People with more fish in their diets tend to be healthier and have fewer of these health problems. There is very little evidence that krill oil is significantly different from regular fish oil. So popping more costly pills of krill oil is not likely to work any miracles for us.

Another side of the problem is common to many supplements - uncertainty. ConsumerLab.com is a company that buys and tests all kinds of supplements, without the manufacturers knowing that they're being tested. Their results on fish and krill oil are not very good. Some products were contaminated with PCBs, dioxin and other known dangerous compounds. Some products were more fish oil than krill oil. Some didn't have what the labels claimed they did. Some claimed they had been tested or approved by the FDA, which does not test or approve supplements at all!

If you want to get supplements, fish oil will do as much good as krill oil will, and it is usually less expensive. But if you want the health benefits, eat fish!

This recipe was developed for our local goodie, mullet. If you can't find that use your favorite fish fillet. It would be good served with a brown rice pilaf, tomato slices and steamed broccoli. Remember that fish that were caught from cold northern water are likely to be higher in the omega-3 fats than warm water fish. Eat for your health!

Festive Fish

2 pounds fresh or frozen fish fillets 1 cup French or Russian salad dressing
1 ½ cups crushed cheese crackers or nacho-flavored tortilla chips
2 Tbsp oil Paprika, lime wedges, parsley

Thaw fillets in refrigerator. Preheat broiler to 500° F. Remove fish skins and cut into 6 portions about equal sizes. Dip in dressing, then turn in dish of crumbs and pat to coat. Arrange on greased baking sheet in single layer. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with paprika. Bake for 10-12 minutes, until fish flakes easily with fork. Garnish with lime wedges and chopped parsley. Serves 6.

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