Omega-3 Fatty Acids

What are Omega-3 Fatty Acids?
Omega-3 fatty acids are a class of fats that have various health benefits. Omega-3 fatty acids are essential fatty acids - that is, our bodies cannot make them, so we need to get them from our diets. The two major omega-3 fatty acids are eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic Acid (DHA). Fatty fish are an excellent source of both of these essential fatty acids.

Benefits of Omega-3 Fatty Acids
- Decrease the risk for heart attack
- Increase “good cholesterol” (HDL)
- Decrease “bad cholesterol” (LDL) and Triglycerides
- Lower blood pressure

Fish that Contain Omega-3 Fatty Acids
- Herring
- Mackerel
- Salmon
- Lake trout
- Tuna

Healthy ways to enjoy fish include baked, poached, grilled and steamed.

Are Fish the Only Sources of Omega-3 Fatty Acids?
No! There are several plant sources of Omega-3 Fatty Acids, which may be especially useful for vegetarians.

Other Sources of Omega-3 Fatty Acids:
- Tofu and other forms of soy beans
- Sesame seeds
- Canola oil and flax seed oil
- Green leafy vegetables
- Walnuts, pecans, and hazelnuts

Spinach walnut salad is an excellent menu item that includes high amounts of plant-based Omega-3’s

What about Mercury Poisoning?
All seafood contains some mercury. It is important to eat a variety of fish that are low in mercury. As long as you consume fish in appropriate amounts, the health benefits of eating fish outweigh the risks. The FDA recommends that healthy adults eat up to 14 oz. of low mercury fish per week.

High Mercury Fish
- Swordfish
- Shark
- King Mackerel
- Tilefish

Low Mercury Fish
- Cod
- Canned Light Tuna
- Shrimp
- Catfish

References
American Heart Association web site: Fish and Omega-3 Fatty Acids. 5 May 2010.

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu