

Munch ON THIS



Eating Fish

*By Marcia Rae
December 15, 2010*

Fish has long been considered an excellent and healthy food -- high in protein and omega 3, and low in cholesterol and calories. But is fish still a good food choice?

According to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, our oceans are in peril from too much fishing. Scientists estimate that 90% of large fish are gone due to over-fishing. On their website they state, "in 2003, the Pew Oceans Commission warned that the world's oceans are in a state of 'silent collapse,' threatening our food supply, marine economies, recreation and the natural legacy we leave our children." Fish is one of the few animals that we still hunt and while it may seem that there are plenty of fish in the sea, that is really not the case. 70% of all fisheries are in decline and the total amount of wild fish being taken from the oceans peaked 20 years ago.

Fish farms now supply about half of the fish we eat, but not all aquaculture is created equally. Fish that eat fish are fed fish as feed and the fish they are fed are wild. It takes three pounds of wild fish to create one pound of farmed salmon – not a good return on investment if you are only considering nutrition and calories.

Some farmed fish are raised in open net pens. Waste from the fish, and disease is dispersed into the open ocean. It is estimated that millions of fish escape these pens into the ocean where they mingle with wild fish, upsetting the ecological balance and gene pool, a problem which could be a big problem with the possibility of GMO fish. Boston based, AquaBounty, has engineered a GMO salmon; the FDA is currently deciding whether this fish is safe. Unfortunately, their question is whether it is safe for human consumption, not whether it is safe for the planet. Truth be told, we really don't know whether GMO foods are safe for the world or for human consumption.

While the FDA ponders the safety of GMO salmon, though, we can turn our attention to factors we can control now. Not all fisheries are depleted. Some are actually sustainable and the fish from them are free of contaminants. The Monterey Bay Aquarium website, montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx, is a great source for information on fish that is healthy for the planet and for us. There you will also find a handy pocket guide which I take with me to the market. It tells me that Alaska wild caught salmon is an excellent choice, but to avoid farmed salmon. Other great choices are Pacific Cod, Dungeness Crab, and Oysters from the Oregon Coast. But be careful of tuna and other large carnivorous fish. They are likely high in mercury and should be avoided, especially large Albacore tuna.

Another way to take care of our fisheries is to only eat the amount of fish protein that is required for your health. A good rule of thumb is to use the palm of your hand as a measurement for portion size. Many people eat much more than that at a meal. A healthier option for you and the planet is to eat less fish and meat, and more vegetables. Of course, you can find those vegetables at WillametteLocalFoods.com as well as tuna from the Oregon Coast.

Munch on This – What if there were no fish?

PS – Oregon's lakes and streams are a good source of fish. But be careful there, as well. Many have unhealthy amounts of mercury. Check with oregon.gov/DHS/ph/envtox/fishconsumption.shtml for current information.

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