

Health Articles

An Open Letter regarding recent reports that low-fat fish like tilapia are unhealthy. (July 16, 2008)

Eating fish, especially oily fish, at least twice per week is recommended for heart disease prevention. Fish is low in total and saturated fats, high in protein and essential trace minerals, and contains long-chain omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA). Oily fish rich in these healthy omega-3s include salmon, trout, albacore tuna, sardines, anchovies, mackerel and herring. Our omega-3 needs can also be met by eating less-oily (lower-fat) fish more often.

Tilapia and catfish are examples of lower-fat fish that have fewer omega-3s than the oily fish listed above, but still provide more of these heart-healthy nutrients than hamburger, steak, chicken, pork or turkey. Actually, a 3 ounce serving of these fish provides over 100 mg of the long chain omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA. Considering that this is about the current daily intake of these fatty acids in the US, even these fish should be considered better choices than most other meat alternatives. Since they are also relatively low in total and saturated fats and high in protein, they clearly can be part of a healthy diet.

US Department of Agriculture statistics indicate that farmed tilapia and catfish contain somewhat more omega-6 fatty acids than omega-3. Most health experts (including organizations such as the American Heart Association and the American Dietetic Association) agree that omega-6 fatty acids are, like omega-3s, heart-healthy nutrients which should be a part of everyone's diet. Omega-6 fatty acids are found primarily in vegetable oils (corn, soybean, safflower, etc) but also in salad dressings, nuts, whole-wheat bread, and chicken.

Replacing tilapia or catfish with "bacon, hamburgers or doughnuts" is absolutely not recommended.

Signed:

[William S. Harris, PhD, FAHA](#)

Sr. Scientist and Director
Metabolism and Nutrition Research Center
Sanford Research/USD
Sioux Falls, SD
(605) 328-1304

Co-signers:

[Thomas Barringer, MD, FAHA](#)

Medical Director, Center for
Cardiovascular Health
Carolinas Medical Center
Charlotte, NC
(704) 446-1823

[Philip Calder, PhD](#)

Professor of Nutritional
Immunology
University of Southampton, UK

Marguerite M. Engler, RN, PhD,
FAHA

Professor
Dept. of Physiological Nursing
UC San Francisco, CA

Mary B. Engler, PhD, RN, MS,
FAHA

Professor and Director
Cardiovascular and Genomics
Graduate Program
Dept. of Physiological Nursing
UC San Francisco, CA

[Bruce Holub, PhD](#)

Professor Emeritus
Dept of Human Biology and
Nutritional Sciences
University of Guelph, Ontario,
Canada

[Peter Howe, PhD](#)

Professor and Director
Nutritional Physiology
Research Centre
University of South
Australia, Adelaide

[Penny Kris-Etherton, PhD,
RD, FAHA](#)

Distinguished Professor of
Nutrition
Penn State University
University Park, PA
(814) 863-2923

[Dariush Mozaffarian, MD,
DrPH, DSc](#)

Assistant Professor
Harvard School of Public
Health
Boston MA
617-432-2887

[Joyce A. Nettleton, DSc](#)

Editor, PUFA and Fats of Life
Newsletters
Denver, CO
303-296-9595

[Yongsoon Park, PhD](#)

Chair and Assistant
professor
Department of Food and
Nutrition
Hanyang University
Seoul, Korea

[Eric Rimm ScD, FAHA](#)

Associate Professor
Harvard Schools of Medicine and
of Public Health
Boston MA
617-432-1843

[Larry Rudel, PhD, FAHA](#)

Professor of Biochemistry
Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, NC
(336) 716-2821

[Frank Sacks, MD, FAHA](#)

Professor of Cardiovascular
Disease Prevention
Harvard School of Public Health
Boston, MA
(617) 432-1420

[Andy Sinclair, PhD](#)

Chair in Human Nutrition
School of Exercise and Nutrition
Sciences
Deakin University
Burwood, Australia

[Clemens von Schacky, MD](#)

Cardiology
Ludwig Maximilians-Universität
München
Munich, Germany