

Fish for your heart

If Australians fall in love with fish it will do their hearts no end of good, says cardiologist **Prof David Colquhoun**.

An inescapable fact of being human is that we must eat, drink and breathe to survive. The cleanliness and quality of these 'inputs' to our mouths have a huge impact on whether we survive and thrive as individuals.

Over the last 50 years, it has become clear as to what constitutes a healthy diet and helps prevent heart disease and probably cancer. For the past 20 years or so, the Heart Foundation of Australia has therefore refined dietary recommendations to reflect the latest in research.

It was first noted at least half a century ago that people who ate fish had lower rates of heart disease and stroke. In virtually every country, people who eat fish regularly are healthier than non-fish eaters. Fish eaters also have lower rates of depression.

In the 1960s, the US scientist Ancel Keys noted in his Seven Countries Study that Japanese fisherman had extremely low rates of heart disease and they ate up to two kilos of fish per day! Remember one daily serve of fish is about 150 grams, so these fishermen were having up to 20 serves of fish per day.

The Heart Foundation recommends that we all have at least two serves of oily fish per week for optimal health and prevention of heart disease. The problem is that less than one-third of Australians eat fish on a regular basis. Despite recommendations, fish consumption does not appear to have increased over the last decade.

Fish – what's not to like?

Fish is affordable in Australia and even canned fish is healthy. Sometimes fish can be a little smelly; if it is then walk on by – fresh, healthy fish does not have a strong 'fishy' odour or taste.

Fish is low in the bad fats and high in the good fats (the omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids known by their shorthand, EPA and DHA), has a number of important minerals such as selenium, and fish in the Australian market is very low in any environmental contaminants.



The Heart Foundation has an excellent review of fish on its website at www.heartfoundation.org.au, which includes excellent charts of healthy oily fish.

Top of the pops for healthy fish rich in the good fats are swordfish, salmon, tuna and sardines. The famous Australian barramundi is moderate in the amount of the good oils and certainly tastes great.

How should I eat fish?

Personally, I love fish lightly grilled with its flavour enhanced with a light lemon sauce, Cajun spice, or subtle Middle-Eastern sauces such as hummus. A lot of the benefit of eating fish is lost if it is battered.

Australians love a big fat chip and, if it is cooked in extra-virgin olive oil, this is the healthiest way to have a chip. An accompanying salad, such as a classic Greek salad, is another brilliant way to go.

Fish is one of the tastiest foods available. Not only does it taste good but it is good for your heart and its vessels, as it protects from heart attacks, strokes and probably some cancers.

We need to relearn to love fish. Do yourself a favour this week: buy yourself some fresh fish, cook it with love and attention or treat yourself to a dinner out with a beautiful fish dish. ♥

*Associate Professor **David Colquhoun** is an integrative cardiologist at Wesley Medical Centre and Greenslopes Private Hospital in Brisbane. He was a member of the Heart Foundation's Nutrition and Metabolism Committee and chief author of its review and position statement on fish.*