

Americans don't eat enough fish and miss out on robust health benefits

November 12 2020, by Michael Tlusty



Salmon caught in the Pacific Ocean is a prize catch. Credit: [NOAA for Unsplash](#)

Eating fish can provide powerful advantages for the [heart and brain](#), yet Americans eat [less than half](#) of the 26 pounds per year that experts recommend. By contrast, Americans buy [seven times more chicken and beef](#) annually than fish.

Why Americans don't eat more [fish](#) has been pondered [for a long time](#) by [health experts](#), fish farmers and fishermen themselves. One way to consider this question is production. Consumers can buy a product only if it's available. The more they buy, theoretically, the more that item will be produced. In this case, a greater demand for fish would be stimulated if more fish were offered for sale.

More [seafood](#) could be made available for American consumers from [global ocean sources](#) given that at least [60% of seafood](#) in the U.S. is imported. U.S. aquaculture has the capacity to [significantly increase](#). Research conducted by the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries](#) also indicates slightly more domestic wild-caught fish can be harvested.

Why eat fish?

Rich in lean protein and long chain omega-3 fatty acids, fish provides robust nutritional benefits that can help ward off [chronic disease, boost immunity and reduce inflammation](#) in the body. Seafood provides your body with critical omega-3 fats and minerals, like selenium, zinc, iron and iodine. It also provides vitamins B12 and D that fend off heart disease, among other benefits.

Fish provides such positive benefits for the body that recent [USDA Dietary Guidelines](#) offer guidance specific to pregnant women and children based on the finding that seafood consumption leads to [cognitive improvement in children](#). Research shows that integrating seafood into a diet as a way to prevent coronary disease can lead to a potential annual health care [savings of US\\$12.7 billion](#).

Additionally, seafood, as a protein, has a relatively [low greenhouse gas production](#). This benefit is heightened when analyzing the [many species](#) that offer both high nutrient density and low greenhouse gas production.

Fish beyond shrimp

The [2015-2020 USDA Dietary Guidelines](#) suggest that Americans eat 26 pounds of seafood each year. The recommended amount would ideally provide 250 mg per day of the important omega-3 fats. Yet because of how American consumers purchase seafood, this provides them with, on average, only 38% of the recommended daily omega-3's.

Many of the most popular seafoods purchased by consumers are relatively low in omega-3's, such as shrimp, the most popular seafood in the U.S., comprising nearly 30% of annual fish sales. Considering the [10 species](#) that make up 85% of fish available for Americans to buy in restaurants and markets, only salmon, the second most popular seafood item, has [relatively high levels of omega-3's](#).

There are many species of fish high in omega-3's that are not regularly purchased or eaten, such as anchovies, herring and sardines. People can replace eating fish by [taking supplements](#) or eating other foods, [such as eggs](#) that contain omega-3's, to help overcome this deficiency. However, research shows that eating fish itself is [better](#) than supplements, given that a fish filet has a full complement of [fats, vitamins, minerals and other supporting molecules](#).

The health and environmental benefits of fish make it a smart choice to buy and eat. With more people [at home](#) because of the pandemic, this is a good time to explore [recipes](#) and [enjoy](#) this nutritionally important food.

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