

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Fish Intake and Overall Health”

It seems that we are constantly being advised to eat less red meat and more fish. Is there a scientific basis for this? A new study in *Arthritis Care & Research* found that eating fish, such as tuna, salmon, sardines, trout, sole, halibut, poke, and grouper, may help reduce joint pain and inflammation in rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patients. RA patients who ate baked, steamed, broiled, or raw fish two or more times per week had significantly less tender and swollen joints, subjective disease activity, and C-reactive protein -- than those who never ate fish or ate it less than once a month. Additional weekly fish servings appeared to add to the benefits. Still, the researchers cautioned that this study was a cross-sectional analysis, so they could not draw firm conclusions about fish consumption and RA disease activity. Another study reported suggest that fish intake might be associated with lower risk of brain cancer. Among brain tumors, gliomas and meningiomas are the two most common types, accounting for more than 80% cases. Although the incidence of brain cancer is relatively low in adults, the prognosis of brain cancer, especially glioma, is unfavorable. As for brain cancer, N-nitroso compounds (NOC), contained in processed meat, has been associated with higher risk of brain tumor and a recent meta-analysis indicated that processed meat consumption was associated with higher risk of brain tumor, while intakes of vegetables, fruits and vitamin A might reduce its risk. Although it is controversial and not consistently supported by the scientific literature, it has been said that as one important component of diet, fish is considered to be quite healthy, which has been found to be associated with lower risk of all-cause mortality, cardiovascular diseases and stroke, as well as some forms of cancer, including colorectal, lung, prostate, breast, and liver cancers. Also controversial is the recent meta-analysis showed that fish intake was associated with lower risk of Alzheimer’s disease. Bunin et al. found that maternal intake of fish is associated with lower risk of subsequent brain tumors in children. But, other studies have failed to find such inverse association between fish intake and brain cancer. Please do not confuse fish intake with fish oil supplement pill intake. Overall, omega-3 PUFA (fish oil) supplementation was not associated with a lower risk of all-cause mortality, cardiac death, sudden death, myocardial infarction, or stroke. And, consumption of fish oil during pregnancy does not benefit babies’ cognitive development. In short, fish oil is no help for heart patients, does not forestall Alzheimer's disease, does not prevent depression, and does not make babies smarter.

In the America that I love, forget pills and eat real fish. Sadly, fried catfish seems to count very little.

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