



# Wild Alaskan Salmon Is a Powerhouse of Nutrition

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✓ Fact Checked

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- > Research suggests that eating oily fish once or twice a week may increase your lifespan by more than two years, and reduce your risk of dying from cardiovascular disease by 35%
- > Compared to those in the lowest percentiles, those with omega-3 blood levels in the highest 20% were 27% less likely to die of any cause; 40% less likely to die of coronary heart disease, and 48% less likely to die of an arrhythmia
- > If you want to maximize health benefits from fish, steer clear of farmed fish, particularly farmed salmon, and even more specifically, genetically engineered farmed salmon, which may end up being approved within the next two years – especially if you're seeking to improve your omega-3 to omega-6 ratio
- > The ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 fat of wild salmon is far superior to farmed. Whereas farmed salmon has a 1-to-1 ratio of omega-3s and omega-6s (due to its "junk food" diet), the ratio for wild sockeye salmon is between 6- and 9-to-1, which is a more ideal ratio
- > Avoid Atlantic salmon, as salmon labeled "Atlantic Salmon" typically comes from fish farms. Look for "Alaskan salmon," and "sockeye salmon," as Alaskan sockeye is not allowed to be farmed and is therefore bound to be wild

**This article was previously published April 15, 2013, and has been updated with new information.**

A slew of media reports encouraging you to eat more fish have surfaced lately, following the publication of a study on omega-3 fats and health. The research, published in *The Annals of Internal Medicine*,<sup>1</sup> suggests that eating oily fish once or twice a week may increase your lifespan.

Naturally, there's still the issue of environmental pollution and contamination, which was not addressed in this study. Do the benefits of eating fish really outweigh the risks of contamination?

In my view, I believe the benefits CAN outweigh the risks, provided you make really wise choices. There are few uncontaminated fish available these days so you need to know what to look for. Needless to say, toxins like mercury and PCB will not do your health any favors.

Lately, I've shifted my own diet a bit, and am now eating three ounces of Wild Alaskan salmon about every other day. But this is really the ONLY fish I'll eat on a regular basis, and the only one I feel comfortable recommending as a good source of healthful fats.

## **Higher Blood Levels of Omega-3 Linked to Longer Life Span**

The featured study investigated how eating fatty fish affected health. Nearly 2,700 American seniors in their seventies were included in the study. None of them had prevalent coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke, or heart failure at the outset of the study.

Rather than rely on food diaries, the researchers measured blood levels of omega-3's instead. Since none of the participants took omega-3 supplements, their levels were indicative of their omega-3 consumption primarily from fish.

Phospholipid fatty acid levels and cardiovascular risk factors were measured in 1992, and the relationships with mortality and incidents of fatal or non-fatal CHD and stroke were assessed through 2008 – a total of 16 years. According to the featured NPR article:<sup>2</sup>

***"After controlling for factors like age, sex and lifestyle, the researchers found that, on average, adults with the highest blood levels of omega-3 fatty acids lived 2.2 years longer. In particular, these adults had a 35% lower risk of dying from cardiovascular disease – which is in line with other studies that have tied omega-3's to cardiovascular benefits.***

***Higher levels of fatty acids were most strongly associated with decreased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke."***

**Compared to those in the lowest percentiles, those with omega-3 blood levels in the highest 20% were:**

- **27% less likely to die of any cause**
- **40% less likely to die of coronary heart disease, and**
- **48% less likely to die of an arrhythmia**

**One drawback is that since it was not a randomized trial, the findings cannot prove causation, meaning there's no way of telling whether higher omega-3 blood levels were solely responsible for the health effects. That said, there's ample evidence that omega-3 is critical for optimal health, particularly cardiovascular health, so this research provides additional support for the value of optimizing your omega-3 intake.**

**In the following video, I interview Randy Hartnell, founder-president of Vital Choice Wild Seafood and Organics, about the differences between wild and farmed salmon. Hartnell spent more than 20 years as a commercial fisherman before forming his company in 2001, which features sustainably harvested wild salmon that are particularly low in heavy metals.**

**I'm a huge fan of their sockeye salmon, and Vital Choice salmon is about the only type of fish I eat, for reasons I'll discuss below.**

## **Media Tries to Mislead You About Healthful Fish Choices**

According to lead author Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian, dean of the Jean Mayer Professor at the Tufts Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, the reason we need omega-3 is because 95% of your cells' membranes are made of fat. Without fats such as omega-3, your cells cannot function properly. He recommends eating one or two servings of fatty fish per week to optimize your blood levels of omega-3.

Interestingly enough, the New York Times<sup>3</sup> gets quite specific about the types of fish recommended: "... 3.5 ounces of farmed salmon, 5 ounces of anchovies or herring, or 15 to 18 ounces of cod or catfish."

FARMED salmon? I think not ... That is one of your WORST options, for a number of reasons that I will detail below. Cod and catfish also primarily come from aquatic fish farms these days. Unfortunately, fish farming has become big business, and a protected one at that.

Let me put it to you plainly: If you want to maximize health benefits from fish, you want to steer clear of farmed fish, particularly farmed salmon, and even more specifically genetically engineered (GE) farmed salmon. December 21, 2012, the US Food and Drug Administration took a giant step closer toward the final approval of the first genetically engineered (GE) food animal – a salmon designed to grow abnormally fast,<sup>4</sup> and to an unnaturally large size.

Today, if you get Atlantic salmon, it is all farmed, as commercial fishing for wild Atlantic salmon is banned in the U.S. under the Endangered Species Act.<sup>5</sup> Not only that, the FDA has approved the farming and sale of GE Atlantic salmon across the U.S. Most recently, a land-based salmon farm is going up in Pioneer, Ohio, in a 479,000 square-foot building, with the first harvest targeted for 2025.<sup>6</sup>

Why would they allow GE salmon? In its approval for the first GE farmed salmon from AquAdvantage, the FDA said:

*"AquAdvantage Salmon has been genetically engineered to reach a growth marker important to the aquaculture industry more rapidly than its non-GE Atlantic salmon counterpart."*

*It does so because it contains an rDNA construct that is composed of the growth hormone gene from Chinook salmon under the control of a promoter (a sequence of DNA that turns on the expression of a gene) from ocean pout (another type of fish). This allows the salmon to grow faster."*

In other words, it's about growing more fish, bigger and faster — and a big financial return in the end for the fish farm industry.

## **How to Identify Wild Salmon From Farm-Raised**

Unfortunately, salmon are often mislabeled (and when they are, as of January 1, 2022,<sup>7</sup> they're labeled as "bioengineered," a term that the USDA thought up, complete with a green, white and yellow label). Additionally, some studies have shown that as much as 70% to 80% of the fish marked "wild" are actually farmed. This includes restaurants, where 90% to 95% of salmon are farmed, yet may be mis-listed on the menu as "wild."

So, how can you tell whether a salmon is wild or farm-raised? The flesh of wild sockeye salmon is bright red, courtesy of its natural astaxanthin content. It's also very lean, so the fat marks, those white stripes you see in the meat, are very thin. If the fish is pale pink with wide fat marks, the salmon is farmed. That's why you should avoid Atlantic salmon which, as I said, comes only from fish farms.

The two designations you want to look for are: "Alaskan salmon," and "sockeye salmon," as Alaskan sockeye is not allowed to be farmed. So, canned salmon labeled "Alaskan Salmon" is a good bet, and if you find sockeye salmon, it's bound to be wild. Again, you can tell sockeye salmon from other salmon by its color; its flesh is bright red opposed to pink, courtesy of its superior astaxanthin content. Sockeye salmon actually has one of the highest concentrations of astaxanthin of any food.

## **Why Farmed Salmon Is an Inferior Choice**

As the first video discusses, there are three major differences between wild-caught and farmed salmon, and once you realize how different the fish are, based on how they were