Studies Affirm Seafood To Be A Healthy Food Choice

Americans can decrease their risk for heart disease by substituting seafood for other animal proteins, according to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. A recent government-sponsored study, by the Institute, finds that seafood is rich in nutrients, low in saturated fats, and should be incorporated more into the American diet to reduce the risk of early death by heart disease—the primary cause of death in this country. These findings affirm dietary guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, with support from the Food and Drug Administration, sponsored this independent study titled, "Seafood Choices: Balancing Benefits and Risks." Both agencies seek to simplify the message for consumers and help the public understand how to maximize important health benefits of eating seafood while minimizing exposure to environmental contaminants found in nearly every food source, including fish.

"NOAA is proud to help bring this potentially life-saving information to the public's attention, especially in light of the alarming rates of death by heart disease among Americans," said Bill Hogarth, director of NOAA Fisheries Service. "With fish populations rebuilding to sustainable levels and under tight harvest controls in U.S. waters, Americans should enjoy seafood as part of a healthy diet."

In spite of some concern about environmental contaminants, the study concludes that, on balance, "seafood is a nutrient-rich food that makes a positive contribution to a healthful diet." The findings advise all Americans to eat seafood regularly. Those who eat more than two servings per week should incorporate a variety of species into their diet to benefit from the variety of nutrients in different species and to avoid accumulated exposure to environmental contaminants.

The study affirms federal guidance tailored for women who are pregnant, nursing or may become pregnant, and children under age 12.

As the study points out, seafood is safer today than in previous decades. Authors of the report emphasize that many environmental pollutants have been declining, including persistent organic compounds such as PCBs, pesticides and other chemicals. Consistent with the Institute's recommendation, the federal government continues to improve monitoring controls for both domestic and imported seafood to address safety concerns, and NOAA continues to develop better methods for detecting environmental conditions that potentially could affect seafood safety. NOAA works with a number of government and state agencies and private organizations to increase seafood safety research, monitoring, early detection, identification, and warning.

NOAA is involved with additional studies currently underway to fill some of the data gaps identified by the Institute related to omega-3 fatty acids, selenium, and other nutrients found in seafood, as well as contaminants such as methyl mercury and PCBs.

An additional study to be released tomorrow in the Journal of the American Medical Association concludes that the benefits of eating seafood far outweigh perceived risks. Researchers with the Harvard School of Public Health conducted the study, "Fish Intake, Contaminants, and Human Health: Evaluating the Risks and the Benefits." The paper points out that even modest consumption of fish reduces risk of coronary death by 36 percent and total mortality by 17 percent. Consistent with the Institute study, the Harvard authors recommend consumers vary the species of fish in their diets and limit intake of large predatory species, which are highest in mercury content.

The Harvard study concludes that avoidance of seafood consumption due to perceived health risks could result in thousands of needless deaths per year due to coronary heart disease and suboptimal neurodevelopment in children.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

In 2007 the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, cel-
ebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA. NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

For more information visit:
NOAA Fisheries: www.nmfs.noaa.gov
NOAA's Seafood & Health page: www.nmfs.noaa.gov/seafood.htm
NOAA: www.noaa.gov

New Study Shows Eating Walnuts Protects Heart Against Short-term Damage From Saturated Fat
It appears that there may be another reason to incorporate walnuts into your diet. A new clinical study published in the October 17, 2006 Journal of the American College of Cardiology, suggests that walnuts, rich in polyunsaturated fats, may protect the body's arteries from the harm associated with eating a meal high in saturated fat. Adding olive oil, known for its monounsaturated fats, does not appear to provide the same type of vascular benefits.

Consumption of a meal high in saturated fat typically causes an inflammatory response in the body that negatively impacts the ability of the arteries to carry necessary blood to tissue and organs and promotes the formation of artery clogging plaque. This response was limited by adding walnuts to such a meal.

"Many people forget that walnuts are an important part of the Mediterranean diet, providing numerous health benefits," said Dr. Emilio Ros, director of the Lipid Clinic at Hospital Clinico in Barcelona, Spain. In fact, "walnuts, unlike olive oil and other nuts, contain significant amounts of polyunsaturated fatty acids, specifically alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), an essential plant based omega-3. They also provide antioxidants and L-arginine, components identified in past studies as potential nutrients that improve artery function," noted Ros.

The findings of this study should not give consumers the green light to consume a diet high in saturated fat. "Consumers would get the wrong message from our findings if they think they can continue eating unhealthy fats provided they add walnuts to their meals," said Ros. Instead, he believes that "people should consume a typical Mediterranean diet low in saturated fats and high in foods containing polyunsaturated fats, such as walnuts."

Link to the study at: www.acc.org.

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