Overhead, the sky is a crystal-line expanse of blue punctuated by drifting billows of clouds. Towering pines look down on a raging torrent of river that wildly sweeps and eddies. Knee-deep in that torrent stands the majestic brown bear, his paws grasping a twisting, gleaming prize—a plump, delicious king salmon.

This is the Copper River in Alaska, home to some of the most acclaimed salmon in the world—and rightly so. It turns out that that bear absolutely has the right idea, for a wild-caught salmon offers myriad benefits.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Many health food stores sell frozen wild Alaskan salmon products. Try WorldCatch Alaskan Salmon Burgers—they taste great grilled and are ready in minutes.

**It All Starts with Omega-3s**

Sure, salmon has an impressive array of nutrients, including a major dose of protein and generous helpings of niacin and vitamin B12, both of which contribute substantially to heart health. But it’s the omega-3 essential fatty acids that make salmon one of the brightest superstars in the food firmament.

Note the designation “essential”—these are compounds that the body must have, but cannot manufacture for itself; it is therefore imperative that they be obtained in sufficient amounts from a food source. And salmon is the ultimate source—chock-full of omega-3s, readily available, and incredibly delicious.

Omega-3s can do all of the following and more: help maintain the integrity of the immune and circulatory systems; reduce the risk of unwanted inflammation; help lower blood pressure and prevent strokes and heart attacks; help prevent erratic heart rhythms; make blood less likely to clot inside arteries; improve the ratio of good cholesterol to bad cholesterol; protect against deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism; reduce the risk of macular degeneration and dry eye syndrome; and protect against a wide array of cancers—prostate, breast, colon, and pancreatic, to name just a few.

And that’s only the beginning. You know that old saying about fish being brain food? Many studies are now indicating a direct correlation between substantial consumption of fish rich in omega-3s, particularly DHA, and better brain function in older people. Indeed, regular and generous helpings of salmon and other cold-water fatty fish may guard against cognitive decline and Alzheimer’s as we age by preventing plaque formation in the brain—a baby boomer’s dream come true.

Depressed? Grill a salmon steak. Studies have shown that because of their anti-inflammatory effects in the brain, omega-3s can protect against depression. Got a surly teenager in the house? Serve up a salmon burger for dinner. A study detailed in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition found a statistically significant relationship between consuming fish rich in omega-3 fats and lower hostility scores in young urban adults.

**Wild Is the Only Way**

Wild-caught salmon is the only way to go, for many reasons. Although farmed salmon is much cheaper and available everywhere year-round, it has been undeniably proven that farmed salmon is loaded with toxins, including flame retardants and dioxins that are classified as human carcinogens. In fact, farmed salmon has a higher toxic equivalency potential score than any other food.

And in terms of damage to the environment and the wild salmon population, farmed salmon is devastating on many levels. Salmon farms themselves are lethal—lice from these coastal pens kill up to 95 percent of the juvenile wild salmon that migrate past them.

So insist on wild-caught salmon, for your own health and the health of our ocean ecosystems. At a restaurant, ask your server if the salmon on the menu is wild-caught, and don’t order it if it’s
EAT SMART | FOOD

Tip: Salmon from Alaska is the best. The wild population there is totally healthy and has the lowest levels of contaminants. If you can find salmon from the Copper River or the Yukon River—you are blessed! They are full-flavored, fatty (therefore higher in omega-3s), and incredibly delicious.

farmed; same thing at your local market—ask for wild-caught only.

When purchasing fresh salmon, as with all fish, smell is your best indicator—there shouldn’t be any. A fresh, clean, slightly briny aroma is fine; any strong or “off” smell means it’s not fresh enough. Develop a relationship with your butcher, and trust him or her to steer you to the best and freshest available. Keep it cold, and cook it up as soon as possible.

roast salmon fillet with pineapple-jalapeño relish

Serves 4 (pictured on p. 44)

Here’s a simple and perfect way to take advantage of the springtime arrival of Alaskan salmon. Serve with a wild rice pilaf and some steamed asparagus—good eating and good health!

¼ cup chopped fresh pineapple
¼ cup diced jicama
1 ½ Tbs. olive oil or jalapeño-lime olive oil, divided
1 Tbs. chopped Italian parsley
¾ Tbs. fresh lime juice
⅛ tsp. minced fresh jalapeño chile

4 6-oz. wild-caught salmon fillets, skin on

1. Preheat oven to 450°F. Cover baking sheet with heavy-duty aluminum foil. Mix together pineapple, jicama, ¼ Tbs. olive oil, parsley, lime juice, and jalapeño in glass bowl. Set aside.

2. Place salmon fillets skin-side down on prepared baking sheet, drizzle fillets with remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil. Roast in oven 13 to 18 minutes, depending on thickness and desired degree of doneness.

3. Remove fillets from pan by sliding spatula between flesh and skin. Place fillets on plates and top with Pineapple-Jalapeño Relish; garnish with lime wedges.

PER SERVING: 340 CAL; 39 G PROT; 17 G TOTAL FAT (3 G SAT FAT); 5 G CARB; 107 MG CHOL; 86 MG SOD; 1 G FIBER; 3 G SUGARS

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