

Fish Tales

Reel in your family with this nutritious catch

by **MADELEINE GREY**

Four-year-old Charlie MacDermott of Vaudreuil, Que., loves to eat fish. Too bad his parents don't share his piscine passion. "When we order out, Charlie insists on fish," says his mom, Sandi Cook. "My husband and I might be eating McDonald's...and there is my son with a plate of salmon. It makes me proud to see him eat so healthy."

Fish does equal healthy. It's an excellent source of high-quality protein, is low in saturated fat and contains omega-3 fats. (All fish and shellfish contain omega-3s, but the amount varies.) Despite that great rep, not everyone can stomach it. Be it the bones, that slimy skin or a certain odiferous quality, fish can be an acquired taste.

Vancouver registered dietitian Diana Steele tries to serve fish to her family twice a week. Her success rate depends on how hungry her three-year-old daughter, Ella, is. "When I'm planning on serving fish for supper, I make sure Ella just has a light afternoon snack like fruit." Consequently, her daughter has developed a love of salmon, whether it's grilled, served simply with salt and pepper, or with a teriyaki sauce.

Emily Tom of Ottawa has been serving fish to her two-year-old son, Nathan, since he was 12 months old. From Chinese-style steamed tilapia to scallops, "as long as it's not overcooked and is tasty, my son will eat any fish."

There's a catch to her fish story. Tom is concerned about chemicals and, due to this, usually sticks to smaller fish like tilapia. According to Health Canada, that's a wise choice.

Trace amounts of mercury are found



In a Serving	
calories	179
protein	22.6 g
fat	6.0 g
carbohydrates	7.4 g
niacin	38%*
magnesium	20%*
calcium	11%*
vitamin B12	48%*
<small>*of recommended daily amount</small>	

Easy-Bake "Pizza" Fish

Got someone in your home who's leery of fish? Catch their taste buds with this easy and inexpensive recipe dressed up like pizza. Bake these fillets frozen, straight from your freezer, and serve on rice.

- 400 g** pkg. mild frozen fish fillets (cod, Alaskan pollock, sole, ocean perch, Boston bluefish)
- 1 cup** (250 mL) high-quality tomato pasta sauce
- ½ cup** (125 mL) grated mozzarella
- 1 tbsp** (15 mL) Parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp** (5 mL) pesto (optional)

Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).

Arrange frozen fish fillets in a 12½ x 8½ in. (3.5 L) baking dish. Spoon pasta sauce over fillets, then sprinkle over with mozzarella and Parmesan. Put little dots of pesto on top.

Bake 22 minutes or until fish is opaque and flakes easily.

Makes 4 servings.

Our recipe tester, Jenny Koniuk, tests Nutrition using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.

in nearly all fish and shellfish due to both pollution and because the water they live in has naturally occurring mercury. The bigger the fish, the higher the risk, because they're higher up in the food chain and accumulate more mercury as they get older. Predatory fish, such as shark, swordfish and tuna, dine on small fry containing minuscule amounts of mercury.

Mercury, of course, is bad news. High amounts can damage the nervous system and long-term studies are being conducted to determine the effects of low levels of mercury, especially on children under age 12 (see "How Much Can You Eat?" to right).

KICK THE CAN?

Ironically, the one seafood many kids love is also under question — tuna in a tin. Although all types of canned tuna are inspected, "testing shows that canned white (albacore) tuna routinely has higher mercury levels than 'light' (for example, skipjack, yellowfin and tongol)," according to Health Canada spokesperson Paige Raymond Kovach.

At present, Health Canada does not advise limiting consumption of canned tuna, even though it has

How Much Can You Eat?

Health Canada has the following guidelines for safely consuming fish:

- Children aged 12 and under and pregnant women should eat no more than one meal per month of shark, swordfish or fresh or frozen tuna.
- Other Canadians should limit those fish to one meal per week.
- A meal is considered to be 6 oz (150 g) of fish.

warned us to limit fresh and frozen tuna. But in the US, the Food and Drug Administration has advised pregnant women and young children to limit albacore tuna to one 6 oz/150 g (about a tin) meal per week.

GO WILD

Is there much difference between farmed and wild salmon? That depends on whom you ask. Health Canada says "consuming farmed salmon does not pose a health risk," but according to Jay Ritchlin, spokesperson for the David Suzuki Foundation, farmed salmon contains significantly higher levels of toxic contaminants — such as PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), pesticides and

dioxins — than wild salmon.

Steele recommends that parents choose wild over farmed, but if that's not possible, she says, "the benefits of omega-3s in farmed salmon outweigh the risks." Omega-3 fatty acids are especially high in salmon, she says, and are good for kids' heart health as well as enhancing brain development and function, especially in the first year of life. It's important, though, to cook salmon properly. Steele's tips:

- Grill or broil so that fat drains off.
- Remove skin and cut off brown, fatty tissues.
- Choose canned salmon (most contain wild salmon, but labels don't generally stipulate this). It's high in bone-building calcium.

Still, all the fishy information in the world won't get the stuff from the plate to a child's mouth. How can you hook your kids on fish?

Start early. Children as young as seven months can get their first taste of fish — but not shellfish.

Serve it regularly. The experts say that if you expose your kids to certain foods on a regular basis, they will eventually eat them.

Stay mild. Kids are apt to like milder fish, such as cod, Boston bluefish, halibut, flounder or sole. More omega-3s are found in high-fat fish, such as herring, anchovy, mackerel, salmon, lake trout, black cod, oysters, tuna, sardines, shark and swordfish.

Think variety. Seafood, such as shrimp, lobster, crab and scallops, contain moderate amounts of omega-3s, and many kids like the taste.

Finally, have the right frame of mind. Despite health warnings about fish, Steele says, "enjoy it and don't stress about it. Try not to focus on what you should avoid, and concentrate on getting more of what's good for you." ♥

Inside the Box

For many kids, frozen fish sticks are their first taste of the stuff, albeit minced, breaded or battered and deep-fried. Commercially prepared fish sticks are most commonly made from cod or its two close relatives, pollock and haddock. Some brands can be high in fat, including trans fats. Here's how they shape up:

BEST CATCH

Highliner Healthy Bake Breaded Fish Fingers 4 pieces (100 g): 120 calories, 1.5 g fat, 0 trans fat, 12 g protein

Janes Kids Disney Fish Nuggets 5 nuggets (110 g): 160 calories, 2.5 g fat, 0 trans fat, 12 g protein

STANDARD FARE

Highliner Family Pack Fish Sticks 4 pieces (100 g): 260 calories, 12 g fat, 0 trans fat, 14 g protein

BlueWater Fish Sticks 4 pieces (100 g): 190 calories, 9 g fat, 0 trans fat, 12 g protein

WATCH OUT

No Name Fish Sticks 4 pieces (100 g): 200 calories, 11 g fat, 2 g trans fat, 10 g protein

BlueWater Fish Fries 4 pieces (113 g): 280 calories, 19 g fat, 0.5 g trans fat, 10 g protein

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On the first Tuesday of every month, join Madeleine Greedy's Talk Food forum and ask questions about your family's food and nutrition: Todayparent.com/forums.