

Can Eating Fish Lower the Risk of Heart Disease in Women?

Researchers find strong relationship between fish consumption and lower heart disease risk in the largest study on women and heart disease to-date.

Heart disease is the #1 killer of both men *and* women, but nearly all previous studies have only looked at factors that reduce the risk in men. However, that's beginning to change. In a recent study – the largest to evaluate risk factors for heart disease *in women* – researchers found an important relationship between consumption of fish and omega-3 fats and lower risk of heart disease.

Scientists analyzed dietary information from nearly 85,000 women from the Nurse's Health Study from 1980-1994. The women were between 34 and 59 years and free from heart disease or cancer in 1980. Based on numerous food questionnaires the women completed from 1980-1994, researchers ranked fish and omega-3 fat consumption in five categories: rarely (<1 time/month), 1-3 times/month, once/week, 2-4 times/week and >5 times/week.

Researchers found that women with higher intakes of fish and omega-3 fats had a lower risk of heart disease. Compared with women who rarely ate fish (<1 time/month), the women who consumed fish and omega-3 fats 1 time/week or more had at least 30% less risk of developing heart disease.

Mackerel, salmon, sardines, and swordfish are rich-sources of omega-3 fats.

While this observational study does not *prove* that fish consumption lowers the risk of heart disease, it gives strong evidence of the protective effects of fish and omega-3 fats on heart-health in women. Additional studies are needed to further evaluate this relationship. In the meantime, researchers indicate that the findings support the current AHA guidelines recommending fish consumption twice weekly for the prevention of heart disease.

References:

Hu, FB, Bronner, L, Willett, WC, Stampger, MJ, Rexrode, KM, Albert, CM, Hunter, D, Manson, JE. (2002). Fish and Omega-3 Fatty Acid Intake and Risk of Coronary Heart Disease in Women. *JAMA*, 287(14): 1815-1821.

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