



## Tilapia should not be removed from diet

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A colleague of mine asked me whether we should warn our patients about the dangers of consuming tilapia. My reply was: "No! Absolutely not!"

Recently, an article was published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* **suggesting that consumption of tilapia may be less beneficial** compared with other types of fish because of lower levels of omega-3 and an increased omega-6 to omega-3 ratio. The media, lay public and some health professionals have misinterpreted this to mean that tilapia is unhealthy. Nothing is further from the truth.

Increasing the consumption of omega-3 fatty acids (particularly docosahexaenoic acid or DHA and eicosapentaenoic acid or EPA) for cardiovascular prevention has been advocated by the American Heart Association and other groups. Because omega-3s are produced by marine phytoplankton and move up the food chain, the best natural source is fatty cold-water ocean fish including sardines, herring, mackerel and salmon. Thus, it has been recommended for us to consume fatty cold-water fish at least twice a week.

It is correct that all freshwater fish, including tilapia, have lower amounts of omega-3 compared with fatty cold-water ocean fish. Some freshwater species such as trout may have high amounts of omega-3 when raised on fish farms and provided feed containing ocean-source omega-3 containing fish meal. As much as I enjoy fly-fishing, I realize that the farmed trout sold in the fish market contains more omega-3 than the wild trout I so avidly pursue.

Tilapia consists of a group of warm-water species including *Oreochromis*, *Sarotherodon* and *Tilapia*. Under the proper conditions, they grow rapidly and do not require input of expensive feeds unlike some other species. Because of this, they are among the most popular species to grow in aquaculture.

Tilapia is a high-quality protein, low in both total and saturated fat. One 100 g serving of tilapia contains less than 1 g of saturated fat. Compare that to 2 g per serving of roast chicken breast and 6 g or more in a broiled hamburger patty. However, even though tilapia is low fat, a serving still contains up to 100 mg of omega-3. The average daily consumption of EPA and DHA in the United States is only 100 mg to 200 mg.

It does not make sense to avoid tilapia because it does not contain as high an amount of omega-3 compared to other species. If your goal is to increase omega-3 intake, it is correct, you should increase consumption of fatty cold-water ocean fish. However, by replacing other less healthy, higher fat sources of protein, tilapia and other freshwater fish still have a place in our diet. It is absurd to frighten people about tilapia while at the same time they do not think twice about consuming fast food.

Come to think of it, there is a recipe for baked tilapia I would like to try out for dinner tonight.