

Advice to eat fish hurts environment: scientists

Last Updated: Monday, March 16, 2009 | 4:42 PM ET [Comments84](#)[Recommend88](#)

[CBC News](#)



Ussif Rashid Sumaila, acting director of the Fisheries Centre at UBC, says encouraging people in developed countries to eat more fish could have disastrous consequences. (CBC)

A team of Canadian scientists is calling dietary guidelines to eat more fish unwise and shortsighted.

The report's lead author told CBC News he expects the analysis to be controversial because it's an argument against health advice based, in part, on environmental concerns.

"You know, this could definitely stir the pot, generally," said Dr. David Jenkins of St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto.

He and report co-author Ussif Rashid Sumaila, acting director of the Fisheries Centre at UBC, analyzed the science behind guidelines throughout the world suggesting people in developed countries eat at least two servings of fish per week.

The study found there is some evidence to support the theory that fish and fish oils, which are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, prevent coronary artery disease.

However, evidence also suggests fish eaters have generally healthier lifestyles than the rest of the population, so the benefit to eating fish is unclear.

Jenkins said that evidence has been ignored in the past.

"There have been areas where fish have been explored, in relation to heart disease, that haven't turned out the way we would have expected ... and these are not being discussed," Jenkins said.

Not enough fish in the sea

While the benefit is uncertain, the researchers write, the cost of this fish-eating advice is very clear.



Eating fish, studies, has been shown to be beneficial in reducing the risk of coronary heart disease. (CBC)

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"It means more demand for fish, which are simply not available. [They're] becoming less and less available in the ocean," Sumaila said.

"Scientists around the world have shown that declines in fish stocks are really serious ... so the evidence there is very strong."

The public has the impression, Sumaila said, that there are plenty of fish in the sea — but that's not the case.

"When you go into the supermarket, you find fish all over and you say, 'C'mon, there's fish all over.' But actually, they're coming from sources we didn't tap into before and there are consequences for that," he said.

If the high demand for fish in developed countries continues, Sumaila said, future generations may not have wild fish to eat.

"If this high demand for fish continues, given the limited supplies, we are pushing the envelope and that can lead to problems in the near future for us and also for our children and grandchildren," he said.

Other pathways to heart health

In the publication, the researchers write, "it would seem responsible to refrain from advocating to people in developed countries that they increase their intake of long-chain omega-3 fatty acids through fish consumption."

The responsible course, they argue, would be to forego guidelines to eat fish and focus on acts with certain health benefits, like eating fruits and vegetables and getting exercise.

"There are many other things that you should be doing and paying attention to, if you're that enthusiastic about your health," Jenkins said.

"What I'm saying is, in that we have many ways of looking after our heart, we should be using those, instead of using the environment."

The peer-reviewed analysis, called "Are dietary recommendations for the use of fish oils sustainable?" will be published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal on Tuesday.

The report's other co-authors are John L. Sievenpiper, Dr. Daniel Pauly, Cyril W.C. Kendall and Farley Mowat.

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[Skyhawk](#) wrote: Posted 2009/03/16

at 4:49 PM ET Fish can be grown in a sustainable way. I've seen tilapia fish ponds that are rotated with rice. The fish themselves are fed agricultural waste products, the ponds then drained once the fish are ready and the high nutrient waste water is used to fertilize other crops. The pond itself is partially flooded after sitting for awhile and planted with rice. No fertilizer is used in this production method.

The Ifugao in the northern Philippines use a different species of fish, but also rotate their terraces between fish and rice. Other crops such as sweet potato are planted on top of the terrace walls. They've successfully done this in a sustainable way without external inputs for over 2000 years.

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[Skidderman](#) wrote: Posted 2009/03/16

at 4:55 PM ET Yes, it would be nice to eat fish more often, but my family finds it expensive and we do worry about the impact to the wild stocks. Looking at the fish available in the markets, we seem to be fishing down the food chain, catching more feeder fish (herring), bottom fish (cod) and "rough fish (pollack)" species. This is not a good trend and will eventually have a side impact on those species like salmon we are trying to protect. We need to look seriously at farming more fin fish and shell fish in an environmentally manageable way, so we can reduce the impact on wild stocks. This is something we should have in all our "backyards" or in our neighbourhoods, that would help teach our children about food production and conservation. While the debate on farmed fish continues, our wild stocks continue to decline. In-action on all parts, will be the death of our wild stocks. Let's try various systems of farmed fish. I'm sure we have the technology to make it work.

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[z s](#) wrote: Posted 2009/03/16

at 5:00 PM ET That picture doesn't help. Now i really want salmon for supper.

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[Morag2000](#) wrote: Posted 2009/03/16

at 5:06 PM ET I have long felt that the increase of fish in the North American diet in the recent years has seriously and negatively impacted upon the oceans.

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[Infraudwetrust](#) wrote: Posted 2009/03/16

at 5:17 PM ET This article is so vague it seems to misinform the reader and gives the impression that all wild

fish are in trouble. I refuse to eat farmed salmon as anywhere they are raised there are sealice and disease problems that have been drastically detrimental to the wild native fish. Just look at other countries around the world where they are raised. Chile , Norway, eastern Canada, and Europe have all experienced disease and sealice problems with farm raised salmon. Pacific halibut stocks, Alaskan and Russian salmon seem to be plentiful, as are some of the B.C. salmon stocks. The scientists don't seem to be recommending eating farmed salmon. Maybe there are other types of farmed fish that are not so damaging to the environment or farmed in closed containment pens that may be healthy.

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