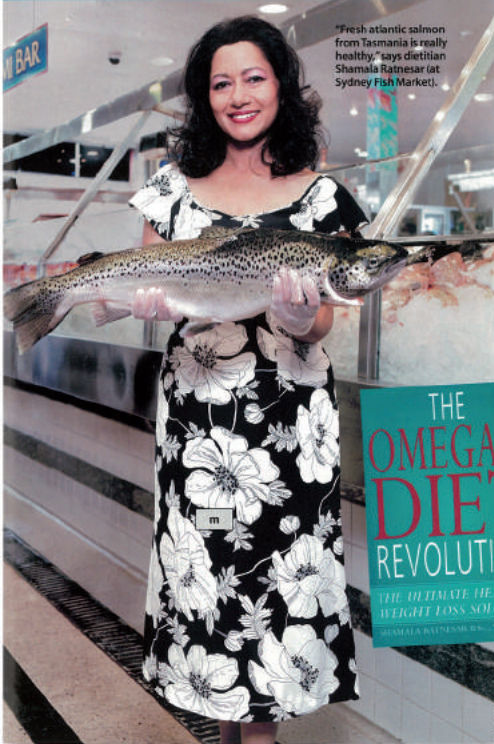


Food for thought

A new diet book says food high in omega-3 gives you more brain power, prevents disease and leads to a longer, happier life



"Fresh atlantic salmon from Tasmania is really healthy," says dietitian Shamala Ratnesar (at Sydney Fish Market).

THE OMEGA-3 DIET REVOLUTION

THE ULTIMATE HEALTH & WEIGHT LOSS SOLUTION

SHAMALA RATNESAR PhD, BSc, RD

Since scientists first isolated omega-3 essential fatty acids in the 1970s, thousands of studies and clinical trials have suggested they are nature's superfood. Essential for good health—possibly even a longer life—omega-3s influence the way molecules, hormones and enzymes interact. But few of us know much about this polyunsaturated fat, which is found in fish and many plant products. Now, after studying omega-3s for 11 years, Sydney consultant dietitian Shamala Ratnesar, 44, has put science into practice in her new book *The Omega-3 Diet Revolution*. "This is a diet book for optimum health and weight loss," says Ratnesar, who checked out the good oils at the Sydney Fish Market with WHO's Jenna Good.

Which foods contain omega-3?

There are two kinds of omega-3—plant and marine. Plant omega-3 is from things like canola margarine, soy and linseed bread and walnuts. Marine omega-3s are in fish and other food like omega-3 eggs.

Are they in all fish?

Yes, but some are richer than others. Salmon, sardines, mackerel and herring are the best source but omega-3 can also be found in other fish, including tuna and snapper. The only fish to avoid are the ones high in mercury, such as shark and catfish.

What are omega-3 eggs?

They are eggs from chickens that are fed a special, high omega-3 diet—the eggs can be found in most supermarkets.

What are the benefits of eating foods containing omega-3?

It can help prevent or manage major heart disease, diabetes and cancer,

boost your brain power, reduce depression and delay the ageing process.

How?

Omega-3 works in many different ways. It increases brain power because 60 per cent of the brain is made up of fat, of which a predominant amount is marine omega-3. So the more we eat the better our brains and nerves work. The risk of heart disease is decreased because omega-3 lowers blood pressure, guards against blood clotting and prevents the chaotic beating of the heart. It makes us happier by suppressing a substance secreted by immune cells that leads to depression.

But does omega-3 actually aid weight loss?

It's not clear at this stage, but new research indicates omega-3 helps with fat loss, especially around the abdominal area. When I have incorporated omega-3 into my program, people lose weight. You can lose weight on most healthy, balanced diets, but you wouldn't get the benefits from omega-3, which are literally life-saving.

Eight Omega-3 Diet rules

- Have some form of omega-3 every day, whether it be eggs, seafood or flaxseed oil.
- Eat two to three serves of any carbohydrate at each meal, ie, a sandwich is made up of two slices, or serves of bread, add an orange to make up three serves.
- Snack on fruit, raisin toast or yogurt.
- Cut saturated fats (including those found in biscuits) right down, but make sure you eat good fats (ie, fish and nuts).
- Fill up on vegetables.
- Eat little and often to keep your sugar levels up.
- Be positive and visualise how you would like to look.
- A glass of red wine a day for women and two for men is considered safe.

Shopping List

- Fresh fish
- Canned fish
- Omega-3 eggs
- Canola oil
- Legumes
- Vegetables and fruit
- Tea
- Low-fat milk
- High-fibre cereal
- Chicken breast
- Flaxseed oil

You devote a chapter to the glycaemic index (GI). How important is this?

The glycaemic index measures the rate at which carbohydrate foods are broken down in our bodies. Those with lower GI give a gradual and sustained blood glucose response. This can make you feel full, thus helping with weight loss and lower insulin response. The quantity of carbohydrate per meal is important. I recommend two to three serves of carb at each meal, one of which should ideally be low GI. A serve is a slice of bread, an apple or a cup of milk. If you're hungry, have something decent like a piece of raisin toast or piece of fruit. Eat foods like strawberries, which are really yummy but don't contain carbohydrate so can be eaten freely.

Eating fish is integral to this eating plan. Is it realistic for someone with a limited budget?

Canned fish is wonderful and cheap. It's also great for busy people as it's so convenient. In Australia, some canned fish is higher in omega-3 than fresh fish. And frozen fish is fine, too, even if it's breaded. In my book, I show readers how to understand the nutritional panel on the packaging.

How much exercise do you recommend?

Walking is very beneficial. People think they have to struggle at the gym, but walking is actually very good—just remember that while you're strolling you should be able to have a conversation but not sing! The longer you exercise the better, but try to aim for 40 to 60 minutes of brisk walking or other exercise six days a week. As well as diet and exercise, being in the right mind-set is also important. Some people can binge eat when they're not even hungry, so being in control is very important. ■

"You'll start to see the health benefits in just three to four days," says Ratnesar.

