**What Have You Been Herring About Fish Oil?**

The term “fish oils” is one seen often in the media in association with health and wellness. Despite the popularity of fish oils increasing, what they are and the role they have in the body are often overlooked.

**What are Fish Oils?**

Fish oils include the oils derived from the tissue fatty fish. Among these oils, the ones that are often noted for their health benefits include Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids. These two fatty acids that are types of fats found in fish and other oils, are unable to be made by the body and thus a dietary source is important. Although both are found in fish Omega-6 fatty acids are also found in plant sources such as flax seeds. On the contrary Omega-3 fatty acids are not as widely found from other sources, as they are in fish, thus fish and fish oils are important to include in a healthy diet.

**Potential Health Benefits of fish oils?**

Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids have been associated with a number of health benefits due to their unique shape. Other commonly known fats such as saturated and trans fats that are straight in shape and have the tendency to pack together in the body, which can lead to blockages. Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids have a different type of bond that holds them together and give them a kinked shape, analogous to a woman’s bobby pin or hockey stick. The bend in its shape prevents it from packing together, thus decreasing the risk of causing a blockage.

This unique characteristic means these fatty acids have a number of health benefits which include lowering cholesterol, blood pressure, risk of heart disease, decreases risk of blood clotting, have anti-inflammatory properties as well as may protect against colon and other cancers.

**Best Sources:**

The best sources of Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids come from types of fish that are higher in fat. Fatty fish, also known as “oily” fish, include many varieties such as trout, mackerel, herring, tuna, sardines, and salmon. Of these sources, mackerel has the highest amounts followed by herring, trout, salmon, sardines and albacore tuna. Although Omega-3 and Omega-6 are found in most fish, there are lower amounts in fish such as yellow fin tuna, cod, lobster and crawfish, which has the lowest amount.

The current recommendations for optimal health involve including a serving of fish twice per week with a serving consisting of 3.5 ounces (105g) cooked, or ¾ cup (188g) of flaked fish.

It should be noted that fish such as king mackerel and other such predatory fish tend to have higher levels of mercury, and should thus be avoided by pregnant women and children. Lower mercury options include salmon, canned light tuna and Pollock.