**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 increasing popularity of fish oil, what they are and the role they have in the body can be overlooked.

**What are Fish Oils?**

Fish oils include the oils derived from the tissue fatty fish. Among these oils, The most common fish oils include omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, which are most noted for their health benefits. These types of fatty acids are considered “essential” which means the human body is unable to produce them and thus can only be obtained by the diet. Although both are found in fish, omega-6 fatty acids are also found in significant amounts in plant sources such as flax seeds and walnuts. The omega-3 fatty acids found in fish is of special importance to the body because in fish they are found in higher amounts and in a more effective form than found in other sources.

**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 gives them a kinked shape, analogous to a 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 fatty fish. Fatty fish are also known as “oily” fish, and includes 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. It is also notable that not all seafood contains high levels of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. There are lower amounts in fish such as yellow fin tuna, and cod.

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.