

Choose Tuna for Heart Health

Tuna, a pantry staple, is an affordable and nutritional technique to boost health. Tuna is an excellent source of protein and heart healthy fats – omega-3 fatty acids - and several minerals. Combined, these nutrients fight heart disease, improve brain function and can help lower weight. “I find that most people know that tuna is a healthy choice, but are confused about the type of tuna to purchase,” shares Susan Mills-Gray, Nutrition & Health Specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

Here’s what you need to know:

- **Choose WHITE tuna for highest level of omega-3 fat and milder flavor.** While “white” tuna is albacore, “light” tuna can be skipjack, yellow fin, big eye, or a combination. The “light” tunas can have a “fisher” flavor but are less expensive.
- **Know there is a mercury risk.** Nearly all fish contain mercury, but tuna has less than most. The current recommendation is 2 servings weekly of cold water fatty fish (i.e. tuna, salmon, mackerel, halibut, cod, or trout). There are two segments of our population that should be careful with potential mercury intake: young children and women trying to get pregnant, or who are pregnant or nursing; these persons should limit intake of low-mercury fish to no more than 12 oz. per week –of that amount, no more than 6 oz. of albacore. Most commercially fished albacore are older than other tunas so have more accumulated mercury, but this doesn’t apply to troll-or pole-caught albacore, which are younger surface feeders.
- **Choose tuna packed in water versus oil.** Water-packed tuna has a milder flavor and fewer calories than oil-packed – about 100 versus 160 for 3 ounces.
- **Chunk vs. Solid depends on end use.** Chunk-style tuna comes in very small, flat pieces, best when you want a smoother texture. Solid tuna comes in large pieces that flake easily. Which you choose depends on how you want to serve it.
- **Canned tuna saves money.** Cans are the cheapest. Mills-Gray shares “Soft-sided pouches cost a lot more because you are paying for the convenience of being able to tear open and use without draining.” Both canned and pouch tunas have a shelf life of 3-4 years unopened.

For more information contact your local MU Extension Center or this faculty member directly at mills-grays@missourie.edu.

(Sources: Savvy Shopper, NIH, and ConsumerLab.com)