



Small helping of health tips

Interesting and important bits of nutrition information come across our desks daily. Often these bits don't constitute enough for full articles, but they are worth mentioning. Here are some recent interesting tidbits.

Chromium warning

The Food Standards Agency of the United Kingdom is advising people not to take chromium picolinate because of evidence that it could cause cancer. The agency is considering a ban on its use in dietary supplements.

Chromium is an essential nutrient, but no type has been proven to cause fat loss, despite the many claims to that effect. Another form of chromium found in supplements, chromium nicotinate, is essentially chromium chemically bound to the vitamin niacin. Based on FSA concerns for the picolinate form, nicotinate is preferred in a supplement.

Fishy friends

The typical fish-oil supplement contains 300 to 500 mg of omega-3 fatty acids. Many people complain that they burp up a fishy taste for a couple of hours

after taking such a supplement. A small, 3-ounce serving of farmed Atlantic salmon can contain 1,000 to 2,000 mg of healthy omega-3s. Thus, enjoying a couple of servings of fish a week would be a more pleasant source of these heart-healthy oils.

There is no officially established upper limit for the intake of omega-3 fatty acids. But there is evidence that regular daily intake in the range of 1,500 to 2,000 mg per day of fish oil omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA) may lead to suppressed immune function and increased risk of bleeding and hemorrhagic stroke. People taking "blood thinner"-type medications should be especially careful to consult their physician before taking supplements of fish oil omega-3s.

Aspartame safe

Another scientific agency, the Scientific Committee on Food of the European Commission, recently re-evaluated the safety of aspartame (NutraSweet or Equal). The report reaffirmed the agency's previous findings, as well as evaluations by agencies such as the U.S. Food and Drug

Administration and the Joint FAO/WHO Committee on Food Additives. All have concluded that aspartame is safe in the amounts approved for use in foods. Their thorough reviews do not confirm current Internet hoopla stating unfounded claims of great dangers from aspartame.

Barley is good stuff

Researchers at the U.S. Department of Agriculture are boosting the reputation of the lowly grain barley. Two separate four-month studies on men and women indicate that eating barley on a regular basis may help with weight control and reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular disease.

This is not a big surprise. Other studies have demonstrated that barley, which is high in soluble dietary fiber, has a very low glycemic index compared with other grains. This means eating barley causes only a minor increase in blood glucose.

Most barley is used for animal feed or making beer, but barley may make you feel better even without turning it into beef or beer.

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