

Why fish is truly a delicacy

GOOD LIVING

BY SOLOMON KARANJA

Fishing in shallow rivers in the village for rare trout as village boys mostly ended up being an exercise in futility as there was little of them in the shallow mountain waters.

With Jine, hook and earthworms we could only manage to get crabs and other water crustaceans after hard fishing expeditions.

Current conventional wisdom has it that the fish we sought has the best and safest animal protein when prepared well — making this boyhood delicacy a much sought after food globally.

A study done in 1997 reported in the New England journal of medicine by Daviglus M:L: and colleagues involving 1822 men in the USA demonstrated that those who ate a kilogram of fish per month showed 40 per cent less risk of unexpected death due to heart attack in a 30-year longitudinal study.

Also Christensen J:H: et al in 1996 reported in the British medical journal that those who habitually eat fish or a diet rich in linoleic acid from vegetable sources (soy products) suffer less arrhythmia's (heart-beat problems) and have lower risk of sudden death due to cardiac arrest especially if they have had a previous heart attack.

Fish from unpolluted rivers, lakes and seas are comparatively healthy, their muscle has less collagen than poultry or mammals and is softer — breaking down during cooking.

The fish meat contains less fat, is



Fish are vulnerable to contamination both in water and when out and require special care and handling.

less dense, has less calories and contains liposoluble vitamin A and D.

At 80 per cent water, 15 per cent protein and fats ranging between 0.64 per cent and 12 per cent; depending on species, and with unsaturated (good) fats and vitamins A, B, D and E; the fish is truly a delicacy when well prepared and sourced from clean waters.

A study reported in The American Journal of clinical nutrition in 1997 showed that consuming 3-7 grams of fish oil a day for at least 2 weeks

caused a 30 per cent reduction of triglyceride levels that circulate in blood and are responsible for arteriosclerosis and increase in cholesterol particularly in women.

Eating fish has been shown to have advantages like reduction of arterial hypertension, slowing the progression of arteriosclerosis, lowering the tendency of clotting of blood and reducing the symptoms of dysmenorrhea during adolescence.

Studies indicate that consuming fish helps to relieve symptoms of psoriasis and theory has it that it could be due to omega-3-fatty acids or the large amounts of vitamin D.

Cod liver oil is derived from cod-fish, and other species like whiting, sithe and pollack and have long been used for preventing and treating conditions such as xerophthalmia, (an eye defect cured by vitamin A use) rickets and because they also contain omega-3-fatty acids which help in

relieving symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis. Cod-liver oil should always be stored in airtight containers and protected from light to prevent them from going rancid.

Fish are vulnerable to contamination both in water and when out and require special care and handling. In contaminated coastlines fish tend to quickly accumulate mercury, heavy metals, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's); dioxins and pesticides in their tissues and are carcinogenic.

Carnivorous fish such as shellfish being up in marine food chain tend to be more highly contaminated with bacteria, viruses and toxins and require placing them in chlorinated water for 48 hours before cooking to decontaminate them.

Fish diseases can find their way into humans and parasites like anisakis, nematode, can cause infestation and allergy in infected individuals. This is avoided by thorough cleaning, avoiding raw fish and cooking.

Steaming, baking or grilling fish is best for your health and all bones should be removed from fish served to children to avoid the danger of bones getting caught in the throat which can result in choking.

Scientists have found out that omega-3-fatty acids are essential for the healthy development of the eyes, and brain. Would-be mothers are encouraged to include them in their diets.

Global marine resources are threatened by depletion and contamination and we must protect them at all costs to save this important food source.

Dr Karanja is a pharmacist in Naivasha
skaranjag@yahoo.com