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Eating Fish May Make Kids Smarter and Sleep Better

Whether you prefer your fish grilled or wrapped in parchment, you may want to start adding more of it to your weekly meal planning. A study in the journal *Scientific Reports* found that eating more fish has multiple health benefits — including higher IQ scores in children. We asked three health experts to comment on the research and share their insights.

HOW FISH HELPS THE BRAIN



The study found that children who ate more fish had better sleep quality and cognition. Researchers also discovered that children who had fish at least once a week scored an average of nearly four points higher on IQ tests. These results support the idea that eating nutrient-dense foods with omega-3s from a young age is critical to children's brain development and overall health.

“I absolutely agree with the statement that increasing the consumption of omega-3 fats improves cognition, including sustained attention, as well as memory capacity,” says nutritionist and chiropractor Dr. Daryl Gioffre. “The brain is 60 percent fat, so [eating] more anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats in the form of fish allows the brain to function better. Previous studies found that blood levels of omega-3 fatty acids significantly predicted a child’s ability to learn. Higher levels, especially DHA [docosahexaenoic acid], were associated with better reading and memory and fewer behavior problems.”

WHAT TYPES OF FISH SHOULD YOU EAT?



After reading this study, you may be tempted to fill your next shopping cart with all the fish you can find. However, some types are worth buying more than others. Registered dietitian Holly Pudwill recommends picking fatty fish such as salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel, and trout. They’re more nutrient-dense than many other fish thanks to their omega-3 fatty acid, vitamin D, and vitamin B12 content. Some other examples of safe fish for children and pregnant women are anchovies and tilapia. Canned light tuna is also a good option.

Keep in mind that children should only have two to three servings of fish in their diet per week. The choices above are low in methyl-mercury, but it’s still important to limit the number of weekly meals with fish, because they can all concentrate mercury from their environment. You also want to avoid swordfish and bigeye tuna due to their higher metal levels.

HOW TO CONVINCING PICKY EATERS TO EAT FISH



If your child is a picky eater who doesn't like the taste or smell of fish, mealtime can get complicated. Pediatrician Dr. Dyan Hes recommends exposing kids to fish from a young age. Babies as young as six months old can have fish broths or puréed fish without bones. Toddlers over the age of two can have two-ounce servings of fish twice a week. Older kids can also help pick out and prepare meals with fish, which encourages them to eat more. In general, many kids prefer milder flavors, so don't overdo it with spices, herbs, or marinades when you're cooking.

"I've found that many kids love sushi and salmon teriyaki. I've also seen some kids really enjoy smoked salmon with cream cheese. If your children don't like the smell, I learned from my grandmother to soak the fish in milk for two hours before preparing it, because it lessens that strong fishy taste," shares Dr. Hes. "I also like to make baked fish fillets. I coat the boneless fish in olive oil and crumble some whole wheat Italian bread crumbs and Parmesan cheese on top. My kids love this."

Consider adding fish to your dinner plans at least once a week: You could end up seeing multiple benefits!

[HTTPS://WWW.BRIT.CO/EATING-FISH-IQ-SLEEP-BENEFITS-CHILDREN/](https://www.brit.co/eating-fish-iq-sleep-benefits-children/)