

Nutrition News

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Catfish and Peaches Are Good for Your Health

August is National Catfish Month!

There is reason to celebrate these scaleless fish. Not only are U. S. farm-raised catfish the No. 1 farm-raised finfish in America, more catfish are produced in the United States on a yearly basis than all other farmed-raised fish combined. According to the Catfish Institute in Jackson, Miss., Americans have doubled their per-capita intake of U.S. farm-raised catfish since 1986. In 2000, Americans ate more than 1 pound of catfish per person, making it the fourth most popular fish in the United States! Some 94 percent of all U.S. farm-raised catfish is raised in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Another reason to celebrate National Catfish Month is that catfish, both farm-raised and wild, are a good nutritional "catch." Catfish are an excellent source of protein. They also are low in calories and saturated (bad) fat. One 3-ounce fillet cooked without added fat contains only 89 calories, 17 grams of protein and has only 2 grams of saturated fat! Catfish also contain a variety of trace vitamins and minerals and are a moderate source of omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, farm-raised catfish contain somewhat more omega-6 fatty acids than omega-3s. Most health experts, including the American Heart Association and the American Dietetic Association, agree that omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids are heart-healthy nutrients that should be a part of everyone's diet.

Omega-6 fatty acids are found in vegetable oils (corn, soybean, safflower, etc.) but are also in salad dressings and nuts. Omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease, prevent blood from clotting and sticking to artery walls and also may help prevent inflammation in diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis. Oily fish, such as salmon, trout, albacore tuna, sardines, anchovies, mackerel, and herring contain higher amounts of omega-3s than catfish. Research has shown, however, that eating any kind of fish at one to two meals per week may cut in half the risk of sudden death from a heart attack. Even though catfish is a lower fat fish, it still provides more of the heart-healthy fats than beef, poultry or pork.

Another food that should be celebrated during the hot days of August is peaches. Like catfish, peaches are not only delicious but are incredibly nutritious. The peach is a member of the rose family. It was first cultivated in China and was a symbol of longevity. Travelers brought the peach seeds to Persia. Later, the seeds were cultivated in Europe. In the early 1600s, Spanish explorers brought them to the New World. By the late 1700s, missionaries planted peach orchards in California.

Today, half of the peach crop comes from the southern region of the United States, including Louisiana, and the other half from California. During winter months, they are imported into the United States from Chile and Mexico.



Peaches can be found in many varieties and are available almost year-round. Variety depends on the season. Semi-freestones are available in late April to June. Freestones (flesh pulls away from the stone easily) and clingstones (flesh clings to the stone) are harvested in mid-June. In Louisiana, the peak season is from mid-June until mid-July. July through August is the national peak period.

The fruit inside is either yellow or white. The traditional yellow fruit is more acidic, which gives it a bit more flavor than the white.

Peaches are packed with a lot of nutritional value. Here are some nutrition facts about this juicy fruit:

- Peaches are naturally low in calories, fat and contain no cholesterol.
- One medium-size peach contains only 38 calories.
- Peaches also contain several major nutrients, such as beta-carotene and potassium.
- One peach provides 10 percent of the recommended daily requirement of vitamin C.
- Peaches are an excellent source of fiber, packing 2 grams of fiber in one medium-size peach.
- Peaches also provide flavonoids, which are compounds naturally found in plants that may help prevent cancer and heart disease.

For better health, count the following servings as 1 cup toward your minimum of five cups of fruits and vegetables per day:

- One large fresh peach, OR
- 1 cup sliced or diced, raw, cooked or canned OR
- 2 canned halves

When selecting fresh peaches, look for those that are becoming soft to the touch, have a firm skin, free of bruises and blemishes and have a fragrant smell. Choose those that have a yellow or cream-colored background. Avoid choosing hard peaches with a green background; they will not ripen and will shrivel instead. Firm-ripe peaches ripen after they are harvested. They can be ripened in a cool place, at room temperature and away from direct sunlight until they should become fully ripe in two to three days.

Peaches make a great snack anytime of the year. Whether you choose fresh, frozen or canned, peaches are an excellent quick-and-easy low-calorie snack.

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