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Moving Good Fats from Fish to Mice



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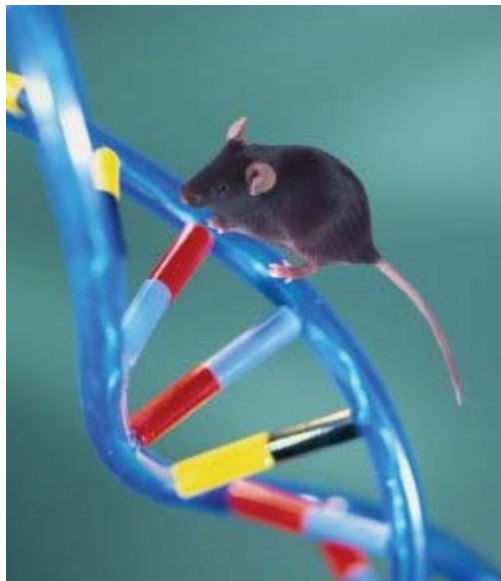


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March 10, 2004

Fish is good for you. But if you can't stand eating fish, you might still be in luck. Thanks to some crafty genetic engineering, omelets, hamburgers, and other foods of the future could have some of the health benefits of fish, without smellir like the sea.

Fish such as trout and salmon are loaded with fats called omega-3 fatty acids. These fats are much better for you than the omega-6 fats found in red meat or poultry. Omega-3 fats make your heart healthier. Omega-6 fats do the opposite.



Adding a certain worm gene to a mouse can get the mouse to produce higher amounts of a healthful fat than a normal mouse does.

Amazingly, worms known as nematodes have a gene that converts omega-6 fat into omega-3 fats. A group of researchers from the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston wanted to see if they could tap into the power of this particula gene. So, they took it out of some worms and put it into some mice. The experimental mice were then raised on the same diet as a group of normal mice

After 8 weeks, muscle tissue from the experimental mice had more omega-3 fat than omega-6 fat. This was a huge improvement. Normal mice have far more omega-6 fat than omega-3 fat.

Researchers hope eventually to be able to put this worm gene into cows and chickens. The resulting milk, beef, and eggs would then be rich in good fats and as healthy for your heart as a slab of grilled salmon.

Don't be surprised if worm genes someday wind up enriching your milk or yogurt. Your taste buds won't notice the difference, but your heart will reap the rewards.—*E. Sohn*

■ Going Deeper:

Harder, Ben. 2004. [Gene transfer puts good fats in mammals](#). *Science News* 165(March 6):157. Available at <http://www.sciencenews.org/articles/20040306/note12.asp>.

Sohn, Emily. 2004. [Building a food pyramid](#). *Science News for Kids* (Feb. 18). Available at <http://www.sciencenewsforkids.org/articles/20040218/Feature1.asp>.

You can learn more about healthy and unhealthy fats in foods at www.kidseatgreat.com/efacids.html (Christine Wood, M.D.).

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