

The Well Now Red Herring Game

Introduction

The over-arching aim of the Well Now way is to help build a fair society that supports personal and collective healing and wellbeing. Well Now works towards this by promoting compassionate self-care and advancing social justice.

The Well Now Red Herring Game contributes to fairness and health justice in several ways.

First, raising awareness of the need for omega-3 and discussing ideas for meals (better still, trying foods) containing omega-3 fats will hopefully improve intake where this is low. This is one, quite straightforward, link to improved self-care and hence personal health.

What about building a fair society? The way that the game is run encourages people to value what they know and helps them to develop skills in critical thinking. In the long run, this teaching style can help build a fair society. This is because it disrupts the usual power imbalance between professional knowledge and personal knowledge. It recognises that there is useful expertise in knowledge that hasn't been of interest to institutions and so makes room for marginalised points of view. It might sound far-fetched to extrapolate this to social change! Certainly, there are a few more steps on the way. However, paying attention to the process means we set off on the right path. (If you'd like to read more about this, look up the work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Friere).

Taking people's experiences seriously also helps them value themselves more. Feeling valued and respecting ourselves impacts self-worth and self-care, which are again linked to health enhancement. It makes us less judgmental toward other people too.

So, while the 'facts' can be useful, treating people as if they are there mainly to receive facts that they lack from an expert is not useful. How we communicate as professionals and how we create knowledge makes a difference to how much people get respected as learners. The Well Now way uses an interactive teaching style that respects learners' experience as vital to the lesson.

We also destabilize unfair ways of thinking by referring to western science as a type of science, as one way of making sense of the world among other valid ways, rather than presenting it as the only useful way by always just calling it 'science'.

Exercise

Divide the Red Herring cards between people. This might mean giving people cards individually, or, if there are literacy issues, giving cards to small groups of people.

Each person/group takes it in turns to read out the statement on the card. The reader says whether they think it is true or false. This might lead to a group discussion. At this stage, ask questions to encourage the group to explore ideas and controversy. It can be helpful to offer some information to support the group to make links between some of the statements by outlining some general principles of action. For example, improved heart health happens because of reduced inflammation (a general principle), and reduced inflammation is also relevant to improving some allergic symptoms and rheumatoid arthritis. However, let the group decide what they think rather than offering the answer at this stage.

The person holding the card then puts it in one of three columns: true; false; unsure.

Discussion of the Game

Hopefully, the 'true' column is the longest! This has a powerful visual impact showing the importance of omega-3 fats in the diet.

The answers are given in the table.

I made up the statements in the 'false' and 'unsure' columns. In fact, I thought all the statements I had made up were false. However, I have since learned that people who have had bariatric surgery are sometimes advised to take omega 3 supplements to try and slow hair loss and strengthen nails. I haven't seen any of the science for this (yet). That's why they are in the unsure column.

You'll see I added the beneficial impact on sporting performance to the list. This can be interesting to mention, explaining links between the general principles (red blood cell membrane more flexible; reduced inflammation; improved immunity) and the particular benefit (improved oxygen delivery from flexible red blood cells; improved recovery and prevention of burn-out from reduced inflammation and improved immunity).

You could also reiterate a general nutritional principle. This is that just because a nutrient is needed doesn't mean that having lots of it is necessary or even beneficial. For example, I have said that omega-3 can enhance sporting performance. What message do you take from this? Do you think that it is important that athletes make sure they have enough omega-3? Or do you think that it is important that athletes have lots of omega-3? In fact, the point is to have enough omega

3. If an athlete already has enough omega-3, having more won't help. It might even interfere with their body's balance of nutrients.

Wrap Up

Ask the group why they think omega-3 is the topic for this game rather than, say, vegetables? Is it because omega-3 fats are a 'super nutrient'?

Prompt by asking how they would feel if they hardly ate any vegetables for a month. (Probably bloated and bored). Now ask how they would feel if they hardly ate any omega 3 for a month. Well, they may not feel any different. Even if they did, would it be possible to link this to lack of omega-3?

It is quite easy to know how eating or not eating vegetables impacts how we feel. But we can't 'tune in' to the benefits of omega-3, or the effect of deficiency, in the same way. That's why omega-3 is the topic of the game – because the 'feel good' effects are not something we are conscious of from body signals.

We could also write a long list of benefits with vegetables. So we're not saying that omega-3 is a super nutrient, or oily fish a super food. What we are saying is that it's important to have omega-3 fats regularly in the diet and oily fish is a good source. And as body signals don't give timely feedback, you might want to think of something that gets you into the habit of having oily fish once a week. Or planning ways to include vegetarian sources daily.

The evidence on the varied ways in which omega-3 fats have benefits in the body is convincing but by no means always certain. For instance, there has been concern that omega-3 supplements (but not intake from fish) may be linked with prostate cancer. On-going biomedical research trials present new information all the time.

Expanded Outline of Supporting Theory

Nutrition: Omega-3 fats are essential for wellbeing. There are three main omega-3 fats, EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid), DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) and ALA (alpha-linolenic acid). The body uses DHA and EPA and can make these from converting ALA. ALA is an essential fatty acid. (The omega-6 fatty acid linoleic acid (LA) is also essential for health).

Marine algae is a rich natural source of DHA and EPA. Oily fish is high in omega-3 fats because the fish eat marine algae. Oily fish common in the UK are herring, kippers, mackerel, pilchards, sprats, sild, salmon, sardines and trout (fresh, chilled and tinned varieties). What are the varieties of oily fish locally available to you?

Meat from grass fed animals can also contain significant amounts of omega-3 fats. EPA and DHA are not found in plant foods. However, some plant foods contain ALA that the body converts to EPA and DHA. Rapeseed (or canola) oil, many nuts and dark green leafy vegetables contain ALA.

Omega-3 fats may also be added to foods during manufacture. For example, some soya milks and yogurts contain omega-3 fats.

Other Realms: This is a topic where it is easy to introduce or open up discussion on ethical/ ecological aspects of food production and harvest, and land-based (indigenous, non-materialist) approaches to eating.

Table 1: Well Now Red Herring Game Effects of Omega 3

| True (according to western science) | False | Uncertain |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| improve immune function | contribute to acne | stimulate nail growth |
| protect from heart disease | make you sweat excessively | give you strong hair |
| keep the artery wall healthy | make your breath smell | |
| reduce abnormal heart rhythms | | |
| improve insulin sensitivity | | |
| improve rheumatoid arthritis | | |
| support brain development | | |
| improve some allergic symptoms | | |
| regulate blood pressure | | |
| reduce depression | | |
| prevent blood clots | | |
| decrease inflammation | | |
| improve oxygen delivery | | |
| reduce blood stickiness | | |
| lower triglycerides (blood fats) | | |
| lower 'bad' cholesterol (VLDL) | | |
| optimise sporting performance | | |

General Principles of Omega-3 Fats in the Body

Omega-3 fats are important for maintaining cell membranes and for making prostaglandins which are substances that regulate many body processes including inflammation and blood clotting.

Some of the key pathways through which omega-3 fats are involved in body processes are:

1. Reduced inflammation (via prostaglandins)

- ♥ Heart: protects artery walls (less plaque, better blood pressure control)
- ♥ Sports: reduces risk of injury and improves healing
- ♥ Allergy: reduced allergic responses
- ♥ Can improve arthritis

2. They make the blood less sticky (reduced blood viscosity) (via prostaglandins)

- ♥ Heart: less clotting
- ♥ Sports: improves transport of oxygen and nutrients

3. Effect on blood fat profiles and impact on metabolism

- ♥ Heart: improved cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- ♥ Brain: support brain development, mood regulation