

Fish Oil: The Benefits And How To Add It To Your Diet



Fish oil is the fat or oil that is extracted from fish tissue. It comes from oily fish like tuna, herring, salmon, mackerel, and anchovies, and is one of the most commonly consumed dietary supplements.

They are usually good for people who don't consume enough omega-3s in their diet, whether it's because they don't like fish, are vegan or vegetarian, or think it's too expensive. And a lot of times, people don't realize that fish can play such a big role in their health. I know I used to think, *who needs fish when you have chicken, fruits, and vegetables?* Too bad those foods alone can't provide our bodies everything it needs, although it comes close.

The World Health Organization recommends eating 1-2 servings of fish per week, but the recommendations will also vary depending on your age and health. Before including fish oil supplements into your regular regimen, it might be wise to consult your doctor to help you incorporate it into your diet and make sure you don't take more than you need.

Fish oil supplements and side effects

Many supplements have up to 1,000 mg of fish oil per serving, but only 300 mg of EPA and DHA (you will read more about them in the next section). So make sure you read labels and choose a supplement that contains at least 500 mg of EPA and DHA per 1,000 mg of fish oil. Natural fish oil also contains vitamins D and A.

Fish oil supplements come in different forms:

- Triglycerides (TG) - In conventional fish oils, omega-3 fatty acids are mostly present as triglycerides.
- Phospholipids (PL) - In whole fish, omega-3s are present as phospholipids, free fatty acids, and triglycerides.
- Free fatty acids (FFA) - In whole fish, omega-3s are present as free fatty acids, phospholipids, and triglycerides.
- Ethyl esters (EE) - When fish oils are processed, either to purify or concentrate them, they become ethyl esters, which are not found in nature.
- Reformed triglycerides (rTG) - The ethyl esters in processed fish oils can be converted back into triglycerides, which turns into “reformed triglycerides”.

Should You Take Supplements?

I have never been a huge fan of taking supplements. Maybe it is because the fact that they are man-made makes me distrust them, or maybe it's because they typically come in pills, and no one likes swallowing pills.

Supplements exist for a good reason, but if I could choose, I would rather get my nutrients through eating foods. There is something about real foods that when it goes into your body, you get more than what any supplement could provide.

And the way foods offer a more complete and balanced source of nutrients could be because of how different foods work together. For example, other than omega-3s in fish, the amino acids could also play a role in keeping you

healthy. Or when you eat an orange, you get vitamin C with beta carotene calcium, and other nutrients.

Supplements are also not regulated in the U.S., and may contain concentrated amounts of the same toxins found in fresh fish. And because the oil is so concentrated, supplements could produce an unpleasant body odor. Here are some other side effects of fish oil supplements:

- Nausea
- Upset stomach
- Loose stool
- Fishy breath
- Fishy taste in your mouth

What are Omega-3s?

The term omega-3s often refers to a group of fatty-acids that don't only play a role in the health of the membrane of every cell in our body, but are essential for preventing and managing heart disease. These are nutrients we cannot make, but instead have to consume through foods like fish and vegetables.

These are the three types of omega-3s:

- Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and
- Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) - both are long-chain fatty acids and come from animal sources, usually in fatty fish
- Alpha- linolenic acid (ALA) - the "plant form" of omega-3. High amounts of this are usually found in flax seeds, chia seeds, and hemp seeds along with certain vegetable oils, nuts, seeds, and some green vegetables. But because ALA is not active in the body, your body must convert it to EPA and DHA in order to be useful. Evidence suggests that the body can't efficiently use ALA the way it can with DHA and EPA.

Omega-3 versus Omega-6

Omega-3 and omega-6 are types of essential fatty acids and polyunsaturated fatty acids that are different in their chemical structure. In modern diets, fish is

the main food source for omega-3s, with EPA and DHA being the most effective forms.

We are supposed to consume both groups of fatty acids in equal proportion, but because our diet involves so much processed foods, we usually consume way more omega-6s than omega-3s. And that imbalance may explain the rise of diseases like asthma, coronary heart disease, some forms of cancer, and more.



Benefits of Omega-3s and Fish Oil

Experts say omega-3s are able to help with so many health problems by encouraging the production of body chemicals that help control inflammation in the joints, bloodstream, and tissues. Here are some benefits of omega-3s and fish oil:

Helps improve cognitive function and those with mental disorders

Your brain is made up of nearly 60 percent fat, and much of it is omega-3 fatty

acids, making them essential for normal brain function. Studies have shown that people with certain mental disorders have lower omega-3 blood levels.

Helps improve symptoms of depression and anxiety

Depression is one of the leading diseases in the world, and it's been found that people with major depression have lower blood levels of omega-3s. Studies have also shown that oils rich in EPA help reduce depressive symptoms more than DHA.

Helps improve asthma symptoms and the risk of allergies

Studies have shown that fish oil may reduce asthma symptoms, especially in early years. One study combined the results of 11 studies involving about 100,000 people. They found that a mother's omega-3 or fish intake could reduce the risk of asthma in children by 24-29%.

Decreases severity of symptoms associated with diabetes

A study shows how fish oil can help reduce the risk of diabetics from developing cognitive deficit. How? By protecting the hippocampus cells from being destroyed. It also shows that fish oil could reduce oxidative stress, which plays an important role in the development of diabetes complications.

Reduces risk of heart disease and cause of death associated with heart disease

Replacing saturated fatty acids in meats with unsaturated fatty acids may lower your cholesterol. They also reduce inflammation, which can damage your blood vessels and lead to heart disease and strokes. Omega-3 fatty acids also help decrease triglycerides, lower blood pressure, reduce blood clotting, and reduce irregular heartbeats.

Reduces risk of some cancers

Studies at the University of Maryland Medical Center found that eating foods rich in omega-3s can help reduce the risk of colon cancer, breast cancer, and prostate cancer.

Other benefits include:

- Reducing risk of osteoporosis and bone loss
- Improving health and reduces symptoms of autoimmune diseases
- Alleviates pain associated with rheumatoid arthritis
- Helps people with ADHD

How to Get Your Omega-3s

For some time, the Food and Drug Administration and other groups have warned about mercury and other harmful chemicals found in fish, so people stop eating them. But as you have read, getting enough omega-3s is essential for good health. Here are some ways you can get your omega-3s:

- Fish like salmon, mackerel, halibut, herring, sardines, trout, and tuna
- Dairy like eggs, margarine, milk, yogurt
- Grains and nuts like bread, flour, pasta, peanut butter, oatmeal, pumpkin seeds, walnuts, and flour tortillas
- Fresh produce with ALA like brussel sprouts, kale, spinach, broccoli, and cauliflower
- Oils with ALA like canola, cod liver, flaxseed, mustard, soybean, and walnut oil



Dangers of Omega-3 Deficiency

After reading about all the benefits you could reap from omega-3s and fish oil, it should be apparent that without enough of them, you could experience some unwanted consequences. Here are some dangers you could see with an omega-3 deficiency:

- Fatigue
- Poor circulation
- Intense menstrual cycle
- Dry, itchy, flaky skin
- Discolored patches of skin or rash
- Dandruff or hair loss

Let us know what your favorite ways of consuming omega-3 fatty acids are!