

IN THE KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

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Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are a type of unsaturated fat primarily found in fish, nuts, and seeds. Omega-3s are essential fatty acids meaning your body cannot produce them on its own. They are crucial to your body's functioning but have some bonus health benefits as well. Check out these additional benefits below:

1. Omega-3s may lower your risk of heart attack and stroke. Studies have shown that fish oil can lower triglyceride levels. This means there is less fat building up in your arteries and veins ensuring that blood can always flow through easily. Omega-3s can also reduce blood pressure, raise 'good' HDL cholesterol, and reduce blood clot formation. These benefits in tandem can reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke.
2. Omega-3s can fight depression and anxiety. Studies have shown that people who eat diets higher in omega-3s have lower levels of depression. While research is still being compiled, it may be beneficial to supplement omega-3 intake if you struggle with depression and anxiety. Always check with your health care provider before adding supplements.
3. Omega-3s can improve the health of your eyes. A certain type of omega-3 called DHA is a component of the retina of the eye. Eating a diet rich in omega-3s can help prevent macular degeneration which leads to poor eyesight and even blindness. Having strong eyesight is paramount to maintaining your independence.
4. Omega-3s are beneficial for infant brain development and healthy pregnancy. Getting an adequate amount of omega-3 fatty acids in pregnancy has been associated with offspring who have better communication skills, higher intelligence, and less risk of developmental defects. These fatty acid compounds are important for visual and neurological development in babies.

5. Symptoms of metabolic syndrome can be reduced by consumption of omega-3. Metabolic syndrome is characterized by central obesity, insulin resistance, and high 'bad' LDL cholesterol levels. Omega-3s act as anti-inflammatory agents that improve insulin use, reduce inflammation, and raise 'good' HDL cholesterol levels.

Other slighter benefits may include:

- Omega-3s could fight autoimmune diseases such as type 1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and lupus.
- Omega-3s could minimize cancer risk by reducing inflammation that contributes to the diseases.
- Omega-3s could slow the progression of Alzheimer's and dementia as they protect against memory loss.
- Omega-3s could reduce asthma in children and young adults by reducing swelling in the lungs.
- Omega-3s could reduce fat in the liver that may contribute to chronic liver disease and hepatitis.
- Omega-3s may improve bone and joint health by boosting calcium absorption in your bones.
- Omega-3 supplementation may help reduce joint pain and increase grip strength.
- Omega-3s are good for your skin: they can hydrate your skin, reduce hyperkeratinization (which causes little red bumps on your upper arms), delay premature skin aging, and reduce acne.

Omega-3s are paramount to optimal health. Like most things, they are best absorbed in food form as opposed to a pill supplement. Check with your doctor before adding supplements.

Plant sources of omega-3s include:

- ❖ Ground flaxseed and flax oil
- ❖ Pumpkin seeds
- ❖ Chia seeds
- ❖ Walnuts/walnut oil
- ❖ Soybean and canola oil

Non-fried oily fish are the best food sources of Omega-3s. These fish include:

- ❖ Anchovies
- ❖ Herring
- ❖ Mackerel
- ❖ Marlin
- ❖ Salmon
- ❖ Sardines
- ❖ Trout
- ❖ Tuna

These foods are typically available at grocery stores, sometimes in a health food aisle. Nuts and seeds can be bought in bulk and last for several weeks. Fish are widely available at both restaurants and seafood markets within grocery stores. It is important to note that fish that is baked or boiled have a greater concentration of omega-3s than fish that are fried. As we continue to learn about the importance of Omega-3s in the diet, foods are becoming fortified with them. Some foods that may be fortified with omega-3s include eggs, yogurt, milk, juices, and infant formulas. Be sure to read labels to determine what products are fortified with omega-3 fatty acids!

Omega-3 supplements are also readily available for purchase. These products can include fish oil, krill oil, cod liver oil, and algal oil. Algal oil is a vegetarian-friendly option made from algae. These supplements are available at supermarkets and drug stores with special supplement sections.

Resources:

<https://www.nutritioncaremanual.org/?err=NLI>

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/17-health-benefits-of-omega-3#section18>

<https://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/omega-3-fatty-acids-fact-sheet#2>

<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Omega3FattyAcids-Consumer/>

<https://www.reviews.com/fish-oil-supplement/>

Tuna Salad

- 1 package (6 ounces) mixed baby greens, or 10 loosely packed cups
- 2 cans (5 ounces each) tuna, drained and flaked
- 1 Granny Smith apple, cored and diced
- 1 can (11 ounces) mandarin orange segments, in juice, drained
- ½ cup (2 ounces) sliced almonds

Salad Directions

Makes: 2 servings

1. Wash your hands and clean your cooking area.
2. Wash your fruits and vegetables if needed.
3. Portion out the 6-ounce bag of baby greens evenly on two plates (3 ounces on each plate or 5 cups of loosely packed baby greens).
4. On each bed of greens add: 1 can of tuna, ½ of the diced apple, ½ can of mandarin orange segments, and 1 ounce of sliced almonds.
5. Top with your favorite dressing! Try our lemon vinaigrette@ See recipe below:

Lemon Vinaigrette

Makes: 2 servings

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1/8th teaspoon garlic powder
- Dash of salt (1/8th teaspoon)
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper

Directions

Combine all ingredients in a small bowl or ramekin. Whisk to combine.

Vinaigrette Nutrition Facts:

Serving Size: 2 tbsp, 2 servings per container, Calories 120, Total Fat 14g, Saturated Fat 2g, Sodium 150 mg, Total Carbohydrate 1 g, Added Sugars 0g.

Source: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension *Be Well, Live Well Be Independents: Eat Well Session 1* packet.