



How to get omega-3 fatty acids in your diet

by **Pixie Stevenson**

Here's the scoop on Omega 3 fatty acids; why they're good for you and how to get them in your diet.

Omega 3 fatty acids are polyunsaturated fats. They are liquid at room temperature. All our body's cells are surrounded by a membrane that is composed mainly of fatty acids. The cell membrane makes intelligent decisions that affect the health of the cell. Healthy cell membranes equal healthy cells equal healthy bodies.

As a blood thinner, Omega 3 helps prevent cardiovascular disease and the risk of stroke. It helps reduce blood pressure and it reduces the build-up of plaque in arteries that cause atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries. The anti-inflammatory properties of Omega 3 help reduce stiffness in people with arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. Its anti-arrhythmic properties help stabilize the heart's rhythm. Studies have also shown that Omega 3 may help prevent cancer. For more information on the medical conditions that may benefit from Omega 3 fatty acids, visit the National Institute of Health's web site.

There is no recommended daily allowance for Omega 3. The simplest suggestion comes from the American Heart Association who recommends eating fish twice a week. Fish such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, sardines and herring are high in Omega 3 fatty acids. Fish can contain high levels of heavy metals such as mercury. One solution to this is to eat young, small fish such as sardines or anchovies. The older and larger the fish, the higher the levels of mercury.

What if you hate seafood? Is there any other food that contains Omega 3?

If you don't like seafood, you might try raw nuts. English walnuts are excellent sources of Omega 3. Other nuts such as almonds and pine nuts all contain Omega 3 in smaller amounts. Raw is the law for nuts though. Roasting nuts robs them of their nutritional value.

Flax seed is also an excellent source of Omega 3 fatty acids. To get the most nutritional value from flax seeds, they should be ground otherwise they pass through your digestive system fairly unscathed. Flax seeds and ground flax can be found at health food stores and in the health food or organic sections of many grocers. Keep flax seeds and flax seed products cool, away from light or in the refrigerator to prevent spoiling.

Green leafy vegetables such as spinach, kale, broccoli and collard greens are recommended as well as soy and tofu. There are many good sources on the internet that provide lists of foods containing Omega 3 fatty acids and the percentage of the daily acceptable intake in those foods. Salmon, walnuts and flax seeds are usually the top three foods listed.

Are taking fish oil supplements just as effective? Studies in Norway show that our bodies benefit more from food sources than in taking a supplement. Eating fresh salmon raised levels of Omega 3 higher than eating smoked salmon. Eating either, fresh or smoked salmon, raised Omega 3 levels higher than taking a fish oil supplement. Anything fresh is always better as processed food has lost much of its nutritional value.

Taking a quantum leap from eating a fast food diet to eating foods that contain Omega 3 fatty acids is not always easy to do. Start slow. Adding excellent sources of Omega 3 to your diet might be as simple as switching from peanuts to walnuts. Throw a couple of tablespoons of ground flax seed onto your cereal or instead of going to McDonalds for a Double Quarter Pounder with Cheese, go to Subway for a tuna sub.

If you have any pre-existing medical conditions, always check with your doctor regarding any dietary supplements or making any changes to your diet. Pregnant women should consult their physician about

eating fresh fish to avoid any fish products that may be high in mercury.

Sources:

Mateljan, George, Omega 3 Fatty Acids, 30-10-20047,
http://www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=nutrient&db_id=84,

Omega 3, 27-02-2003, <http://www.seafoodfromnorway.com/page?id=262&key=23691>,

Blankenship, Vicki, Top 10 Omega 3 Sources, 21-06-2007,
<http://www.thatsfit.com/2007/06/21/top-10-omega-3-food-sources/>

Medline Plus, 01-11-2006, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/patient-fishoil.html>

Fish & Omega 3 Fatty Acids, 31-10-07 <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4632>

IOM Report on Macronutrients Misses the Mark on Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Washington DC, 5 September 2002

http://www.supplementquality.com/news/loM_omega3.html

Copyright © 2002-2008 Helium, Inc. All rights reserved.