
Omega-3 Fatty Acids

There are 3 types of Omega-3 fatty acids. All types of omega-3 fatty acids are polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs.) PUFAs are longer chain fatty acids with more than one double bond in their chemical structure. The human body cannot create fatty acids on its own with the same chemical structure as all the types of omega-3 fatty acids. Therefore omega-3 fatty acids are considered essential.

The only efficient way to increase the levels of omega-3 fatty acids in our body is to eat them in our diet.

Types

- Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA)
- Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)
- Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA)

It is possible for our body to convert some ALA to EPA and DHA; however, this is not a good way to increase EPA and DHA in our body. Less than 15% of the ALA that we eat is converted. We would have to eat large amount of ALA to reach the recommended amount of EPA and DHA. To make sure our body has enough of these essential fatty acids, it is important to include sources of all 3 types of omega-3 fatty acids in our diet.

Benefits

- Improve heart health and may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease
- Lower triglycerides
- Maintain healthy eyes
- Assist with rheumatoid arthritis
- Reduce risk of some cancers related to anti-inflammatory benefits
- Improve depression
- Reduce risk of Alzheimer's and cognitive decline

How Much Do You Need?

	Grams/Day ALA
Adult men	1.6
Adult women	1.1

For adults, there are no established recommended daily intakes for EPA and DHA.

Food Sources

Omega-3 fatty acid	Food
ALA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Flaxseed• Chia seeds• Walnuts• Canola oil• Soybean oil
DHA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salmon• Herring• Sardines• Mackerel• Trout• Cod• Tilapia• Tuna
EPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salmon• Herring• Sardines• Trout• Cod

Eating two 4oz (checkbook-size) portions of fish per week provides the recommended daily amount of DHA and EPA. Try to bake, broil or grill fish and avoid frying.

Dietary Supplements

If you are unable to eat omega-3s in your diet, you can consider adding a supplement. Check with your medical team before starting a supplement. Supplements can also interact with medications like warfarin (coumadin.) Supplements are available from several sources including fish oil, krill oil and algal oil. Look for dietary supplements that are USP verified.