

MAKE FISH YOUR MAIN DISH

FISHING FOR OMEGA 3

When it comes to fats, there's one type you don't want to be cutting back on - long chain n-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids! Although it doesn't exactly roll off the tongue, you may know them better as Omega-3.

What is Omega-3?

Omega 3 is a highly unsaturated fat, making it something that is commonly referred to as a "healthy fat" because of its chemical structure. Omega 3 fatty acids are essential fatty acids, meaning they are essential for health and cannot be made by the body.

Sources and Types

There are different forms of Omega 3, coming from different dietary sources.

EPA (Eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) are found in oily fish and fish liver oils, while ALA (Alpha-linolenic acid) is the most commonly consumed omega 3 in the Western diet, and is found in vegetable oils and green plants, such as flaxseed, nuts, and some dark leafy vegetables.

However, not all omega 3's are created equally - ALA found in plants is not used very effectively by the human body, and alone don't offer the health benefits that its' fishy-counterparts, DHA and EPA, can, making oily fish and fish oil a far superior dietary source of omega 3's than plant sources alone.

Health Benefits

Studies have consistently shown a myriad of health benefits associated with adequate omega 3 consumption.

There is strong evidence to suggest that eating fish, in particular oily fish, is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, arthritis and asthma, which is thought to be due to the omega 3's present and their anti-inflammatory properties. It's also been shown that eating at least 2 portions of fish per week is associated with ~25% lower risk of death from Coronary Heart Disease compared to eating no or very little fish.

Studies have shown links with omega 3 consumption to normal brain function and cognitive health, with evidence to suggest that higher fish intake may be associated with a lower risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease, depression and anxiety as well as a slower rate of cognitive decline in older individuals.

Omega 3 consumption contributes to the maintenance of healthy skin, hair and nails, and even reduces the risk of age-related blindness. As if that isn't enough, there are European Health Claims that EPA and DHA help maintain normal blood pressure, normal blood triglyceride (fat) levels, and normal function of the heart - phew!

Health professionals place an emphasis on the importance of optimal oily fish and omega 3 consumption for pregnant and breast-feeding women, due to the positive health outcomes in new-born babies into early childhood.

How can we get more?

In the UK and Ireland, intakes of omega 3 are generally low.

It is recommended that adults should consume at least two portions of fish per week, one of which should be oily to meet their omega 3 recommendations. One portion is around 140g when cooked. If choosing tinned varieties, try choose one that is tinned in water as opposed to oil or brine.

What Are The Best Sources of Omega 3?

MARINE SOURCES (EPA AND DHA)	PLANT SOURCES (ALA)
Salmon	Flaxseed and Flax Oil
Tuna (except tinned)	Soybean
Sardines	Walnuts
Kippers	Dark leafy veg – spinach, broccoli
Mackerel	Chia Seeds
Herring	Hemp seeds and oil
Rainbow Trout	

What if I don't like fish or I have an allergy?

You can get almost 10 times as much omega 3 from a portion of oily fish as you can from a capsule or supplement. However, although dietary intake of omega 3 from fish is far superior to supplementation in terms of potency and uptake by the body, omega 3 supplements can be a convenient and easy way to ensure you are meeting optimal consumption, and will still provide you with all the amazing health benefits. When choosing an omega 3 supplement, the recommendation for adults is to consume 250-500mg per day of pure omega 3. EPA and DHA are both words used to describe omega 3 which you will see on the label. Do not take omega 3 supplements containing vitamin A if you are pregnant or planning for a baby.

What about for Veggies/Vegans?

If you follow a vegetarian or vegan diet, plant sources of omega 3's (ALA) are still important, despite their low conversion rate. Algal supplements of EPA and DHA are available for those with allergies or following a vegan/vegetarian diet, and should be considered to ensure you are meeting all your nutrient requirements.

The health benefits of Omega 3 fatty acids are many. The majority of us are currently not meeting the recommended intake of 1-2 portions of oily fish per week. Good sources include Salmon, Tuna (except tinned), Sardines, Kippers, Mackerel, Herring and Rainbow Trout. Experiment with new and different recipes to find ways of including more in your diet, and reap the benefits!

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