

Let's Ask The Experts

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: What You Should Know

(NAPSA)—Americans have been warned for so long to reduce the amount of fat in their diets, it may come as a surprise to learn that scientists have now discovered that there is such a thing as “good” fat. Recent research suggests that *Omega-3 fatty acids*, members of the “essential fatty acid” family, are linked to lower rates of heart disease, improved mental functions and vision and possibly even protection against some cancers and degenerative diseases such as arthritis and Alzheimer’s disease.

What are Omega-3 fatty acids?

Omega-3 fatty acids are a type of polyunsaturated fat. These fats help the body regulate blood pressure and blood clotting and may even reduce inflammation. Unfortunately, despite the many benefits of Omega-3’s, our bodies cannot manufacture their own supply of these fatty acids and therefore rely on us to obtain Omega-3’s through foods or supplements.

While Omega-3 fatty acids have been linked to a wide range of health benefits, the greatest research has been focused on their role in promoting cardiovascular health. Two Omega-3’s—eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)—have been shown in some studies to prevent the risk of heart disease by lowering the amount of LDL or “bad” cholesterol in the blood.

How can people get the Omega-3 fatty acids their bodies need?

Omega-3’s are most commonly found in oils from fatty fish such as sardines, tuna, salmon, mullet, herring, trout, mackerel and anchovies. But experts caution that diet alone may not be enough. “Most of us don’t get enough of the recommended nutrients from our



diet and Omega-3’s are no exception,” says Bill Benda, M.D., director of medical and public affairs for the National Integrative Medicine Council. So, while the American Heart Association recommends eating two three-ounce servings of fatty fish per week, Dr. Benda advises his patients who cannot meet this dietary requirement to supplement their daily diet with one or two tablespoons of flaxseed oil, which provides the same beneficial amount of Omega-3 as fish oil.

Can people take too much Omega-3 fatty acid?

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, people should not consume more than three grams of EPA and DHA fatty acids per day from food sources and/or dietary supplements. However, according to Dr. Benda, it is unlikely that anyone would ever consume that much. “Once you are getting the Omega-3’s you need, my only advice would be to cut down on the other fats that are not as beneficial, such as saturated fats,” he said.

For more information about the National Integrative Medicine Council, visit their Web site at www.nimc.org.