

GET ACTIVE. STAY ACTIVE

Are Omega 3 supplements good for you?

-Ryan

Grosse Pointe Woods

By: Tom Mack, AT
Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan

Omega 3 supplements have become very popular lately and for good reason. Research has shown many health benefits from proper intake of omega 3 fatty acids which need to be consumed since the body cannot make them. These benefits include improved heart health, lowered cholesterol, lessening of symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis and other auto-immune diseases, better insulin sensitivity, and reduced risk of heart attack, stroke, and other chronic diseases.

Omega 3s include ALA (alpha-linolenic acid) commonly found in flax seeds, flax seed oils, and dark green leafy vegetables, and EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexanoic acid) found primarily in cold water fish such as salmon and blue fin tuna. Because the typical western diet is normally not rich in omega 3 sources, it may be beneficial to consider supplementation in addition to better dietary choices to maintain and improve health.

Fish oil supplements found at health food stores as well as some grocery stores provide beneficial amounts of EPA and DHA. EPA is needed to make health protecting eicosanoid hormones that help regulate cell metabolism. DHA is required for brain development, brain function and also has heart protective anti-inflammatory functions.

Flax oil supplements, which can be obtained as capsules or bottled oil as well as actual flax seeds, provide the omega 3 source ALA. ALA is a good source for vegans to get optimal amounts of their omega 3s. The body also has the ability to convert ALA to EPA and DHA when needed. Flax seed supplements and some flax oil supplements, besides providing a good amount of ALA, also contain lignans which are beneficial nutrients found in the fiber portion of the flax.

When considering supplement sources, it is important to consider price, convenience, organic sources, and processing. Organic sources usually contain less mercury and should not contain PCBs both of which can pose a risk if consumed in excess. Omega 3 supplements are normally sensitive to light, heat, and oxygen, so it is important that they are packaged and stored accordingly. Also dietary preference may be a factor with vegans opting for the plant source, ALA, in flax seed oil supplements.

Overall, omega 3 supplementation may be a good option to augment normal dietary intake. It is always, however, important to consult with your doctor or health care provider when taking these or any other kind of supplements.

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