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Omega 3 - How to add them to your diet and help your heart powered by BlogBurst

POSTED: Tuesday, May 08, 2007
 FROM BLOG: [Nutrition Tidbits](#) - Fun and practical diet tips from the largest online nutrition community run by Registered Dietitians - HealthCastle.com

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What are omega 3 fatty acids? They're a nutritional element that first caught researchers' attention about 20 years ago - and what they discovered could have health benefits for anyone worried about a healthy heart.



In the early 1980s, studies showed that the Inuit had low rates of heart disease despite their high-fat diet rich in fish. It turns out the omega 3 fatty acids in the fish may be what protects their hearts, along with other health benefits.

Benefits of Omega 3 Fatty Acids in Heart Disease and Cholesterol

Omega 3 fatty acids are poly-unsaturated fatty acids. Studies show that a diet rich in omega 3 fatty acids may help lower triglycerides and increase HDL cholesterol (the good cholesterol). Omega 3 fatty acids may also act as an anticoagulant to prevent blood from clotting. Several other studies also suggest that these fatty acids may help lower high blood pressure.

Potential Benefits of Omega 3 Fatty Acids in Alzheimer's

Omega 3 fatty acids may protect against the accumulation in the body of a protein believed to be linked to Alzheimer's disease, according to the results of a new animal study published in the March 2005 issue of The Journal of Neuroscience. This study specifically investigated one particular kind of omega 3 fatty acids - Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), and the results are encouraging.

Omega 3: Fish or Plant?

With the increasing popularity of vegetarian diets and mounting fears about mercury and PCBs in seafood, people often ask about using flax oil (which contains alpha-linolenic acids - or ALA) instead of fish oil.

Our bodies can convert ALA into eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) - the beneficial elements of omega 3 omega acids - but the conversion process is slow. In addition, a high concentration of ALA (as present in flax oil pills) has been linked to higher risk of prostate cancer by some early research. Until more is known, men may be safest to choose fish oil for heart-healthy omega 3s instead of plant-sourced ALA.

Where to find Omega 3 fatty acids?

- All fish contain omega 3 fatty acids, but they are more concentrated in fatty fish such as mackerel, salmon, sardines and herring. The American Heart Association recommends eating fish at least 2 times a week.
- Many commercial food products, such as bread and baked goods, yogurt and infant formula are now fortified with omega 3 fatty acids.
- Other sources of omega 3s include:
 - Green leafy vegetables
 - Soy and tofu
 - Nuts and seeds like almonds, walnuts, pine nuts, and flax seed
 - Cooking oils such as flax seed oil, canola oil, and soybean oil (for more information, read [The Best Cooking Oils](#))
 - Some eggs, such as omega-3 enhanced eggs

Caution:

- Cod liver oil is not a good source of omega 3 acids. It may cause toxicity in excess amount due to its high levels of Vitamin A and Vitamin D.
- Men are best to avoid flax oil pills until more is known about flax's potential link with prostate cancer.

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