

ARE FISH OIL SUPPLEMENTS BENEFICIAL?



What is fish oil? What is omega-3 fatty acid?

- Fish oil is derived from the tissue of oily fish.
- It contains the active ingredient omega-3 fatty acid.
- The major types of omega-3 fatty acids include eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and can be found in fish and seafood. Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), another type of omega-3 fatty acid, is derived from plants.

Are there side effects from fish oil supplements?

- The most common side effects are nausea, gastrointestinal upset and “fishy” burp.
- Very high intakes could cause excessive bleeding in some people.

Should you take a fish oil supplement? Who benefits?

- A food-based approach to increasing omega-3 fatty acid is preferable. So before you reach for fish oil supplements, it is worth following a heart-healthy diet full of fresh fruits and vegetables, with lean protein such as fish.
- A recent trial from the New England Journal of Medicine showed omega-3 fatty acid supplementation in the general population **did not** result in a lower rate of heart disease.
- **For people without Coronary Heart Disease:** The American Heart Association advises eating a variety of fish (preferably oily fish) twice or more per week. Evidence does not support taking fish oil supplements to prevent cardiovascular disease in the general population.
- **For people with documented Coronary Heart Disease:** 1,000 milligrams per day of omega-3 fatty acid, preferably from oily fish, is recommended by the American Heart Association.
- **For people with high triglyceride levels:** 2,000 to 4,000 milligrams of EPA and DHA per day can lower triglyceride levels by 20% to 40%.

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Does fish oil help with other health related issues?

- It has been studied in other medical conditions including Alzheimer's disease, depression and Crohn's disease and **has not** shown benefits.
- It has also been studied in patients with cancer and stroke, and **has not** been shown to decrease chances of getting either condition.
- Some studies have shown fish oil may be beneficial in reducing symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis.

What are good sources of omega-3 fatty acid?

- The major types of omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA) can be found in seafood, krill oil and especially oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines and albacore tuna.
- It is important to limit the intake of fish with the highest level of potential mercury contamination: shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish.
- Alpha-linoleic acid (ALA) is an essential omega-3 fatty acid and can be found in walnuts, flaxseeds, chia seeds, hemp seeds and soybean oil.

When should you ask a doctor if you need a fish oil supplement?

- If you have high levels of triglyceride.
- If you have a history of Coronary Heart Disease and do not get enough omega-3 fatty acid from your diet.

Words of caution...

- Over-the-counter fish oil supplements usually contain other oils and components different from the active ingredient of omega-3 fatty acid.
- On average, over-the-counter fish oil supplements contain about 180 milligrams of omega-3 fatty acid or less.
- When choosing a fish oil supplement, check the drug label to see how much omega-3 fatty acid — EPA and DHA — is actually present in the supplement.
- Supplements rich in EPA and DHA are usually more expensive.

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