

# **The Fats Your Body Needs**

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Like vitamins and minerals, there are two types of fats that cannot be produced by your body and, therefore, must be eaten or supplemented. These “essential” fats are called omega-3 and omega-6 unsaturated fats. Omega-6 fat is plentiful in the foods we eat daily, but omega-3 fat is far more difficult to get, due to its limited availability in the food supply. The two richest sources of omega-3 fats are flax seed oil and fish oil. Omega-3 and 6 fats play many roles within the body, including the production of chemicals called prostaglandins. It is the ratio of these two fats that plays a vital role in maintaining optimum health. Read on to find out why you don’t need to go searching for omega-6—it’s omega-3 you need!

## **Omega-3 Fat for Heart, Mood, Joints, Muscles and More**

Omega-3 fats promote numerous health benefits to the body. Studies show consuming adequate omega-3 fats can enhance good cholesterol, keep blood thin to prevent clotting, decrease blood pressure, improve mood, enhance nerve function, improve healing, cushion joints, decrease inflammation, reduce cancer risk, and even help build muscle.

Many athletes take omega-3 fats so they can use fewer pain-relieving drugs and enjoy greater joint mobility. Due to their low fat lifestyle, bodybuilders need to take extra omega-3 fats to supply vital cell membrane fatty acids. Without adequate omega-3 fats, you may actually limit your muscle growth. Omega-3 fats help build muscle faster by improving recovery and adaptation to exercise through healthy prostaglandin production and by supplying cellular fatty acids. By increasing your omega-3 fat intake and decreasing your non-essential fat consumption, you make it possible for your body to utilize more stored body fat for energy, getting you leaner faster.

Essential fats like omega-3 actually help improve mood by supporting proper nerve function, help suppress hunger by slowing digestion and stabilizing blood sugar levels, and help improve cellular function by providing vital cell membrane nutrients. Omega-3 fats are actually part of every human cell, from brain, to bone, to muscle.

## **Flax—Inexpensive Vegetable Source of Omega-3**

Flax is a vegetable source of omega-3 fat, also known as ALA (alpha linolenic acid). Your body converts a portion of this omega-3 fat into two other health promoting fats, the first being EPA (Eicosapentenoic Acid) and then to DHA (Docosahexaenoic Acid). These two fats are the “active” forms of the omega-3 fats in the body.

Flax oil, from crushed or pressed flax seed, has a slightly nutty taste and can easily be added to salad with balsamic vinegar, mixed in protein shakes, drizzled over toast or vegetables, mixed into tuna, or just taken by the tablespoon. Be careful not to heat or cook or bake with flax oil because it will smoke at very low temperature. Since it is an unsaturated fat, it can go rancid quickly too. Store your flax away from air and sunlight in order to keep it fresh. Refrigerate the flax oil after opening for maximum freshness. Softgels don’t have to be refrigerated after opening since they are already sealed from the air. If you follow these guidelines, you can keep a bottle of flax oil fresh for three-four months and softgels even longer. Hopefully, you’re taking it daily, so it won’t even last that long. Take at least a tablespoon of flax oil every day or about 12-15 1,000 mg flax oil softgels. This will provide you with an adequate amount of ALA for conversion to EPA and then DHA.

### **Fish Oil—“The Direct Source” of Omega-3**

Fish oil capsules are high in EPA and DHA, the directly usable form of omega-3 fats. If you take flax oil, the alpha linolenic acid in flax must be converted by enzymes in the body to EPA and DHA. By taking fish oil capsules, your body does not need to make this conversion. Fish oil has been shown to benefit heart health, reduce cancer risk, and benefit mental health. It's important to eat fish rich in omega-3 fats like salmon, herring, mackerel or sardines two to three times a week. However, unless you love these oily-type fish, taking fish oil supplements may be a far more palatable way to get your valuable essential fats.

### **Mothers and Children Need Omega-3 Fats**

Omega-3 fats are vitally important for pregnant mothers, infants and young children as they grow. While pregnant and nursing, mothers should make sure they are getting plenty of EPA and DHA to promote optimal brain and nerve growth. Growing children need omega-3 fats for proper brain development, hormone production, and physical growth. Unfortunately, most children don't get nearly enough of the omega-3 fats in their diet. When was the last time you got your kids to eat salmon or sardines? You get the point? You may need to bribe them or hide it in their food, but find a way to get flax or fish oil into your child's diet. It can make a big difference in their learning capacity, progress in school, and their future success.

### **Evening Primrose Oil for GLA**

Evening primrose oil contains 9% GLA (gamma linolenic acid) a special omega-6 fatty acid. Clinical research on evening primrose oil suggests that it reduces inflammation, thins the blood, and may have benefits in menopausal women. This oil also contains other phytonutrients that also help balance out hormones. GLA is excellent for dry skin, the immune system, and cellular function. About 20% of the population may have trouble converting omega-6 linoleic acid into GLA, so supplementation can be helpful. Taking one to three grams per day is recommended, but more may be taken depending on your specific needs. Most benefits are seen by women with PMS or those transitioning through menopause.

### **Avoid the Bad Fats**

While attempting to get more good omega-3 fats, try to decrease your intake of other fats. Lower your intake of saturated animal fat from beef, pork, and veal. Cut all visible white fat off before cooking. Avoid the bad trans fats found in margarine, lard, and shortening. Instead, use monounsaturated fats like those found in olive oil and avocado oil, which have health promoting properties like improved immune function and lower cancer risk rates.

### **Eat the Right Ratio of Good Fats**

The idea is to get your ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 fats to end up somewhere between 1:1 and 1:5 with 1:1 (or 50:50) being preferred. Diets rich in omega-6s reduce the conversion of ALA to EPA and DHA by 50%. Since omega-6 fats are relatively easy to consume in a normal diet, it's the omega-3 fats you want to focus your attention on.

Consume at least five to 10 grams of fat daily from omega-3 sources with at least one to two grams coming from EPA and DHA (fish oil). A tablespoon a day of flax oil is all you need. Or, take three to five fish oil capsules a day. Better yet, take some of both. Those with a family history of heart disease should lean toward getting a higher percentage of their omega-3s from fish oil.

Menopausal women might consider adding in three grams of an evening primrose oil supplement.

By combining flax oil and fish oil supplements, you'll be sure to get your daily omega-3 needs. No matter how you decide to get your essential fats, the long-term rewards for your efforts will far exceed the cost and trouble you took to incorporate them into your diet.

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