

The Benefits of Fish Oils

Some fats are good for you. Other fats are bad for you. Fats can accomplish a lot of good for the body. Fats can also harm the body. Trans-fatty acids that are artificially produced are bad in even the smallest amount. Similarly, saturated fats from animal products should be kept to a minimum. The healthiest fats are those that turn liquid at room temperature. These fats are known as oils. They contain essential fatty acids which are so dubbed because without them, we die. Essential fatty acids are polyunsaturated and divided into two families: the omega-6 essential fatty acids and the omega-3 essential fatty acids.

The difference between these two families of fats is very small. Their molecular structures act differently while inside the human body. While the metabolic products of omega-6 acids encourage inflammation, blood clotting, and tumor growth, the omega-3 acids act in an entirely different way. Because of this difference, we need both omega-3s and omega-6s in our bodies in spite of the fact that it has become increasingly clear that omega-6 in excess can have terrible consequences.

Many scientists have discovered several reasons to believe that the high incidence of heart disease, obesity, hypertension, diabetes, premature aging, and some forms of cancer is because of the imbalance between our intake of omega-6 and omega-3. Previously, our ancestors thrived on a perfectly balanced diet of omega-6 and omega-3 with a ratio of 1:1. Recent changes in our dietary habits through the centuries have pushed that ratio to something that is close to 20:1. Of course, this spells trouble big time.

Origins of Fatty Acids

Omega-6 fatty acids are mostly found in vegetable oils such as corn oil and soy oil. Both of these contain high amounts of linoleic acid which are essential components that comprise omega-6. In contrast, omega-3 fatty acids are found in flaxseed oil, walnut oil, and marine plankton and fish oils.

Flaxseed and walnut oils are mainly alpha-linoleic acids while the primary components of fatty fish and fish oils are eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). The most active and advantageous of these fatty acids are EPA and DHA which are found in fish oils.

Advantages of Fish Oils

The importance of fish oils was first suggested when Danish physicians observed that Greenland Eskimos have low risks of heart disease and arthritis. This is surprising, considering that the Eskimos consume high-fat diet. The benefit was later credited to the presence of EPA and DHA in fish oils and fatty fish.

More modern researches have also shown that fish oils (EPA and DHA) play a vital role in the prevention of atherosclerosis, heart attack, depression, and cancer. Clinical studies were also conducted and the results distinctly showed the effect of fish oils against these chronic ailments. Many disorders including rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, ulcerative colitis, and Raynaud's disease may also be treated through fish oil supplementation.

How Fish Oil Affects the Human Brain

One of the greatest "consumers" of fish oil DHA is the human brain. Indeed, a normal adult human brain contains more than a few grams of fish oil DHA. Low levels of fish oil DHA are thought to reduce the secretion of the hormone serotonin which is associated with behavioral disorders such as depression, suicide, and violence. Studies regarding the treatment of Alzheimer's disease have shown that a high intake of fish and fish oils may significantly decrease age-related memory loss and cognitive function impairment.

There are several more benefits linked to the consumption fish oils. Those mentioned above are only a short list.