



Omega 3s – Get into the Swim of It

What are Omega 3s?

Omega 3 is a type of fat. Fat is either saturated or unsaturated. Unsaturated fat is divided into 2 subgroups i.e. Omega 3s and Omega 6s. Examples of Omega 3 fats are Decosahexanoic acid (DHA) and Eicosapentanoic acid (EPA). You can make these fats in your body but it is a slow process.

How can they improve my health?

- Reduce the stickiness of blood
- Thin the blood
- Protect blood vessel walls
- Reduce Triglycerides
- Reduce Inflammation
- Correct electrical beats of the heart
- Healthy brain development in infants
- Maintain healthy bone joints

Table 1: Omega-3 fatty acid content (EPA and DHA) of selected fish and seafood, functional foods and fish oil supplements

Product	Concentration of sum of EPA and DHA*
Fish or seafood	
Mackerel	2500 mg/100 g
Herring	1700 mg/100 g
Salmon	1200 mg/100 g
Trout	500 mg/100 g
Halibut	400 mg/100 g
Tuna	400 mg/100 g
Shrimp	300 mg/100 g
Cod	300 mg/100 g
Functional foods	
Liquid eggs (Omega Pro)†	900 mg/180 mL
Fish oil supplements	
Standard	300 mg/capsule
Specialty (Omega 600)‡	600 mg/capsule

What foods contain omega 3?

Oily fish is the richest source of Omega 3. This includes salmon, mackerel, rainbow trout, fresh tuna, herring, shrimp, crab, sardines and pilchards. Tinned fish is as acceptable as fresh. Weaker sources include flaxseed or linseed oil, rapeseed or canola oil, walnuts, and dark green vegetables.

What about tinned tuna?

Omega 3 fat is greatly reduced during the tinning process. Therefore tinned tuna should not be counted as one of your weekly portions of oily fish. If fresh fish is too expensive or is not available in your area, choose tinned salmon, mackerel or sardines.

Health Claims

Foods containing Omega 3 fat can now carry a health claim for promoting a ‘reduced risk of coronary heart disease’.



How much should I eat?

2 portions of fish per week, at least one of which must be oily, is sufficient for general health. This is equivalent to 500mg of Omega 3. 3-4 portions of oily fish, or 1000mg, is strongly recommended if you have heart disease or are at risk of heart disease.

Do I need a supplement?

You do not need a supplement if you are eating oily fish as recommended. If you dislike fish or have high requirements for omega 3, taking omega 3 in supplement form should be considered. There are many Omega 3 supplements on the market. Be sure to buy the one that meets your personal needs. If the label quotes DHA and EPA content, add the 2 figures together to get total Omega 3 content. Flaxseed supplements are available for vegetarians.

The FDA recommends that consumers not exceed more than a total of 3 g per day of EPA and DHA omega-3 fatty acids, with no more than 2 g per day from a dietary supplement.

Is cod liver oil the same as omega 3 oil?

Cod liver oil does contain Omega 3, but standard varieties tend to have low amounts of it. It can be fortified with Omega 3 so check the label. Cod liver oil also contains vitamin A and D, which can be toxic if taken in mega doses – always read the label.

Safety issues

There has been much speculation recently regarding the safety of fish. This is due to chemicals called dioxins and mercury. Maximum intakes have been set at 4 portions per week for men and non-childbearing women. Pregnant or lactating women and women planning to have a baby should not exceed 2 portions per week. This group and children under 16 years of age should also avoid shark, marlin and swordfish.

Make an effort to increase Omega 3s in your diet