

- Health / Medical Awareness

# Everything you need to know about the Omega-3s

Manila Bulletin · 4 Dec 2018 · C-1 · (Note: Email inquiries on health matters to: [medical\\_notes2@yahoo.com](mailto:medical_notes2@yahoo.com))  
 EDUARDO GONZALES, MD

Aren't fats bad for the body? How come omega-3 fatty acids are beneficial for us? What exactly are their health benefits? Is it advisable to take fish oil supplements? — [georgina\\_siy@gmail.com](mailto:georgina_siy@gmail.com)



Not all fats are bad. There are good fats, and the omega 3- fatty acids are prototypical examples. Omega -3 fatty acids are a family of essential fat molecules whose main members are EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid), DHA (docosahexaenoic), and ALA (alpha-linolenic acid). The omega-3 fatty acids are actually essential fats, which means we cannot survive without them. They are needed by our cells in performing their metabolic processes. They act as gatekeepers of our cells. They regulate the entry of nutrients and exit of waste products from our cells.

We need to source omega-3 fatty acids from our diet because our body can only synthesize a limited amount of these essential substances. We derive ALA from plant sources such as nuts and seeds while we obtain EPA and DHA from fatty fish.

## Benefits of omega-3 fatty acids

Aside from being essential, the omega-3 fatty acids also deliver some big health benefits. There is strong evidence to suggest that they favorably affect a number of risk factors for cardiovascular disease, and thus they can help reduce our risk of

sudden death from heart attack. Studies have consistently indicated that omega-3 fatty acids exert a strong anti-inflammatory effect and we know that inflammation plays a key role in the development of heart disease, as well as arthritis. Omega-3 fatty acids also evidently decrease blood triglycerides levels, reduce the risk of abnormal heartbeats, and lower blood pressure, which are important risk factors for coronary heart disease.

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), omega-3 fatty acids benefit the heart of healthy people as well as those who have cardiovascular disease or are at risk of developing it.

Other conditions where omega-3 fatty acids may have beneficial effects include asthma, ADHD, depression, and Alzheimer's disease. But in these conditions, the evidence is still far from being conclusive.

The case against fish oil and other omega-3 fatty acid supplements

There is no scientific proof that mega doses of omega 3-fatty acids, which fish oil and other omega-3 fatty acids supplements can deliver and confer additional health benefits. In fact, existing evidence shows that mega doses of these supplements may be harmful.

The most telling study against fish oil supplements was published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute in 2013. The study was conducted by scientists at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in the US and involved the comparison of the blood concentration of omega-3 fatty acids of 834 men who had been diagnosed with prostate cancer to a group of 1,393 men selected randomly from the 35,000 participants of the Selenium and Vitamin E Cancer Prevention Trial (SELECT). The study showed that high blood levels of omega-3 fatty acids are associated with a 71 percent increase in risk for high grade prostate cancers (which are highly fatal) and an overall increase risk of 43 percent for all forms of prostate cancer. The study only confirmed the results of a previous one by the same research group and another one by a European research team.

Perhaps because of these well-publicized studies, sales of fish oil supplements, which peaked at \$1.3 billion in the US in 2012, began to flatten and decline beginning in 2014.

Omega-3 fatty acid supplements (DHA/EPA) can likewise make bleeding more likely. Thus, people with a bleeding condition or take medicines that could increase bleeding like aspirin, coumadin, Plavix, and NSAIDs are best advised not to take these supplements.

Best sources of omega-3 fatty acids

We definitely need omega-3s, but they are best derived from our diet. Good dietary sources of fish oil are fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, herring, lake trout, anchovies, sardines, and tuna. Plant sources include chia seeds, walnuts, canola oil, soybean, and soybean oil, flaxseeds, and flaxseed oil.

To ensure we are taking enough omega-3 fatty acids, we should favor fish and nuts over red meat as a source of protein.

Studies have consistently indicated that omega-3 fatty acids exert a strong anti-inflammatory effect and we know that inflammation plays a key role in the development of heart disease, as well as arthritis.