

- Nutrition

Something's fishy

Are fish oil and omega-3 supplements necessary?

They say that humans and supplements are like plants and fertilizers: They can live without them, but they can live better with them. Aside from a healthy, balanced diet, supplements, from the word itself, can complete your daily nutrient needs and, at the same time, enhance your overall health by boosting repair, circulation, and absorption of important vitamins and minerals.

Currently, the supplement market is a billion-dollar industry, and one can find almost every vitamin, mineral, amino acid, and more in a pill, powder, or liquid form. There's vitamins C and E as antioxidants, calcium for the bones, probiotics for gut health, and so on.

Among the supplements gaining popularity is fish oil that is rich in Omega-3, believed to benefit one's cardiovascular health. Sounds like a miracle. But still, is there a catch in taking this supplement?



SKINVESTING
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is beneficial for eye health, bones, and joints; it helps with immunity; it supports fetal development; and it is even linked with an improvement in those with Alzheimer's disease.

But more important, consumers take fish oil because of its reported cardiovascular benefits. The body produces little amount of Omega-3, so it has to be derived from food. Fish oil, cod liver oil, and algal oil are examples of Omega-3 supplements that vary in dosage and types of Omega-3 present. Nevertheless, fish oil supplements are the most popular in the past years because it contains a concentration of EPA and DHA that provides the most health benefits, notably for cardiovascular health.

This is where it gets "fishy." While the American Heart Association (AHA) recommends eating fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines, and tuna twice a week, or two servings per week, the AHA is on the fence

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Omega-3 fatty acids are the kind of fats that are good for you. This "good" kind has a lot of different types, but there are three that are the most important: Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) that are found in certain kinds of fish like salmon, mackerel, and tuna; and also alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), an omega-3 fatty acid that can be found in nuts and seeds such as walnuts, flaxseed, and dark leafy vegetables. ALA, however, must be converted by the body into DHA and EPA to become beneficial.

Omega-3 fatty acids are important for various health reasons: It supports cellular health; it is an anti-inflammatory that can help with mood and sleep; it

when it comes to supplementation. According to them, Omega-3 or fish oil supplements, in particular, are only advisable to those individuals who currently have specific, prevalent heart conditions. Otherwise, taking fish oil is not recommended for prevention of heart attacks, stroke, and other cardiovascular conditions of those who do not have them. Moreover, studies on fish oil supplementation are conflicting. For example, among two popular trials that have been conducted, VITAL showed little to no effect on taking Omega-3 with regards to heart health, while the REDUCE-IT trial showed favorable outcomes in reducing cardiovascular events among patients.

While results are opposite, they are incomparable as well, according to Dr. Bassam Albaba of the Health Sciences and Medicine of Dresden International University. He said that VITAL tested patients who were free from heart ailments, while the REDUCE-IT trial had clear CVD risk factors among its subjects.

All in all, there is still insufficient data to prove the effectiveness of Omega-3 or fish oil supplements, especially in the prevention of cardiovascular disease. If you are not diagnosed with a heart condition, it is still advisable to consume fish rather than supple-

ments, and if you do have a cardiovascular problem, inform your doctor so he can make a decision if supplementation is for you.

Supplements are a good addition to one's diet; but still, remember to choose which one is beneficial for your body. Every individual experiences a different state of health at a time, and therefore, has different health requirements as he or she ages. This is why, even if most supplements may be bought over the counter or without a doctor's prescription, it is still important to get the green light from your physician. Also, remember that supplements are not medi-

cines. There is no evidence that these can treat an illness or disease. In fact, if taken too many or if not taken right, supplements may even counteract and worsen the health conditions of some individuals. As for Omega-3 supplements, more research is needed to strengthen its claims on cardiovascular health.

Having said that, make sure to check with your doctor if it can still be added to your diet, especially if you have a cardiovascular risk. While supplements do complement and benefit one's health in more ways than one, there is still no substitute for a balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle.

