

Sorting Through Omega- 3 Fatty Acids

Everywhere in the grocery store, food choices such as eggs, yogurt, and juice advertise omega-3 fatty acids added to their ingredients. We know that omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids are "essential" in our diets, our bodies cannot produce them and we must obtain them from food sources. This suggests that the more food we purchase fortified with omega-3's the better. Is it worth placing products enriched with omega-3 fatty acids in your shopping cart?

Omega-3 fatty acids are categorized into three types:

1. Alpha-linolenic acid (**ALA**)

The most common and abundant omega-3 eaten by North Americans (found in flax, walnut, soybean, canola); we are rarely deficient.

2. Docosahexaenoic acid (**DHA**)
3. Eicosapentaenoic acid (**EPA**)

Researchers agree that DHA and EPA are the most beneficial for our health, yet *we frequently lack them in our diet*. DHA and EPA are found in marine sources only; mackerel, salmon, herring, trout, sardines, with small amounts found in tuna and some shell fish.

DHA and EPA are; crucial for fetal eye and brain development, decrease risk of heart attack and stroke, and may reduce risk of Alzheimer's, dementia, and age-related macular degeneration (leading to blindness in older adults). ALA, DHA, and EPA collectively have been found to reduce inflammation in body tissues.

To meet EPA and DHA needs, consuming 2 or more servings (3 oz) of the marine sources above are required every week. (Health Canada recommends 1.0-1.5 g total omega-3's/day for most adults)

If you do not consume regular amounts of the fish listed above, omega-3 fortified foods may be worthwhile additions to your grocery list. Be sure that the ingredient label clearly lists "DHA" or "EPA", as these are the omega-3's we lack. If the specific omega-3 is not listed on the label, assume the omega-3 is ALA and choose a different product to gain the most advantage for both your health and your wallet.

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