

# Eating Guidelines for Omega-3 Fats

## Information about Omega-3 Fats

Omega-3 fats are heart healthy fats that have many functions in our body. They are important for good health. There are 3 types of omega-3 fats:

- ALA - alpha-linolenic acid
- DHA - docosahexaenoic acid
- EPA - eicosapentaenoic acid.

ALA is called an essential fat because the body cannot make it. ALA can be changed in the body to DHA and EPA but this is very limited. Many scientists think ALA may also have some heart health benefits. More research is needed to confirm this idea.

DHA and EPA have many health benefits and functions. They:

- Are important in brain, nerve, and eye development in infants.
- Can reduce your risk of heart disease.
- May improve your immune system.
- May protect against some types of cancer.
- May help in the prevention of dementia and Alzheimer's disease, and the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. Further studies are needed to better determine their role in these diseases.

Health Canada recommends 1.1-1.6 grams of ALA each day. To follow a healthy diet, eat at least 2 servings of fish per week which provides an average of about 0.3-0.45 grams of EPA or DHA per day.



## Steps you can take

Getting ALA in your diet can be easy. Great sources of ALA include: flaxseed, flaxseed oil, canola oil, soybean oil, soy products, non-hydrogenated margarine made with canola or soybean oil, walnuts and omega-3 eggs.

To get DHA and EPA, eat fish at least twice a week. Fatty fish are the best sources of EPA and DHA. Choose fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, sardines, herring, Arctic Char, anchovies and trout more often.

### Don't Eat Fish?

If you don't eat fish, there are other ways to get omega-3 fats. You will get small amounts of EPA and DHA from omega-3 eggs and margarine, DHA milk and DHA yogurt, algal oil supplements (made from algae), foods that are enriched with fish oil. Be sure to include canola oil, soybean oil, flaxseed oil, flaxseeds, soy products and walnuts for their ALA.

### Have Heart Disease?

You may benefit from an omega-3 (DHA/EPA) supplement if you have heart disease or are at risk of developing it. Speak to your doctor or a dietitian to get more information.

To increase the amount of omega-3 fat in your diet, follow these easy tips:

1. Use canola or soybean oil for cooking and in recipes.
2. Grind your flaxseed to increase the absorption of ALA. Otherwise very little of the ALA is absorbed by the body. Grind the flaxseeds in small batches and store it in the fridge in a sealed container to keep it fresh.
3. Use flaxseed oil in uncooked salad dressings and dips.
4. Add 60 mL ( $\frac{1}{4}$  cup) of walnuts or tofu to a salad. You can eat

these foods as a snack too.

5. Replace regular eggs with omega-3 eggs.
6. Choose non-hydrogenated margarine made with canola and/or soybean oil.
7. Eat a tuna or salmon sandwich for lunch once a week.
8. Have a "fish night" once a week.

To help your body change ALA to EPA / DHA avoid foods high in trans fats and saturated fats and limit other oils such as safflower, sunflower and corn oil.

### Concerned About Mercury?

Most fish is safe to eat. Fish provides protein, many nutrients and contains DHA and EPA. Choose fish that are low in mercury. If you eat fish more than twice a week, choose different types to reduce your intake of mercury.

Only certain types of fish need to be avoided or limited due to high mercury levels. If you can become pregnant, or are pregnant or breastfeeding, you will need to eat smaller portions of these types of fish. Children also need to limit their intake of high mercury fish. For more information on mercury in fish, including a list of safe choices, check out the website listed in the "Additional Resources" section.



### Additional Resources

- Health Canada, "Mercury and Fish" [http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/chem-chim/envIRON/mercur/merc\\_fish\\_qa-poisson\\_gr-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/chem-chim/envIRON/mercur/merc_fish_qa-poisson_gr-eng.php)

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