

Omega 3 Information

Essential Fatty Acids: Omega 3's

There are 3 main types of fatty acids: saturated, unsaturated, and monounsaturated. Omega-3 fatty acids are classified as unsaturated. There are three omega-3 fats: (alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), eicosapentanoic acid (EPA), and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). ALA is found mostly in plant foods. EPA and DHA are found mostly in fish. Our bodies convert ALA into EPA and DHA. That means, if you don't consume fish, most of your omega-3 intake comes from ALA and is converted by your body into EPA and DHA.

Essential fatty acids (EFAs) are essential because the body needs them to be healthy and cannot make them. They must be acquired through the diet. Saturated fats come from animal products such as meat and dairy. They are not essential because the body makes all that it needs. These saturated fats or trans fats are what clog the arteries and interfere with the body's ability to use EFAs efficiently.

The omega 3 fatty acid DHA is needed for normal brain function throughout life. It is a major component of the cell membranes of the brain and eye. Research has found that omega-3 consumption can enhance infant brain development and visual activity. Many mother's diets contain high amounts of trans fatty acids and low amounts of the healthy omega-3 fatty acids. Supplementation during the third trimester of pregnancy and in lactation is something to consider if one is not consuming an adequate dietary intake of essential fatty acids. Infants undergo much brain development in the third trimester of pregnancy until the age of 2 years old. Omega 3's are reported by the FDA to reduce the risk of coronary artery disease as well. There are some reports that supplementation of 200-400 mg DHA can help with depression and some psychiatrists recommend taking a DHA supplement.

How much DHA or omega-3 fatty acids you should consume is still being investigated. The FDA recommends that consumers not exceed more than a total of 3000 mg per day of EPA and DHA omega 3 fatty acids, with no more than 2000 mg per day from a dietary supplement. The American Heart Association recommends 1000mg of EPA/DHA per day for patients with coronary disease and 500 mg per day for people with no known cardiovascular disease. The National Institutes of Health recommends 300 mg DHA per day as an adequate intake for pregnant and nursing women.

Various options/ways to enhance your consumption of Omega 3 fatty acids:

1. Expecta: marketed by Mead Johnson (200mg DHA). Made by Martek, the bioscience company that also enhances infant formula with the exact same DHA supplement that is in Enfamil Lipil. It is made in the lab from algae sources.

2. Flaxseed oil (1-2 Tablespoons) or Flax oil capsules. Flax oil contains the two polyunsaturated fats linoleic acid and alpha-linoleic acid. It should be cold expeller pressed and unfiltered to be effective and best if high in lignans. It must be stored in the refrigerator. Flax seeds must be ground and stored in the refrigerator to retain its properties
3. Prenatal vitamin that contains essential fatty acids: PrimaCare (360 mg DHA from a fish source), PrimaCare One (360 mg DHA from a fish source), Encora (1300mg DHA and EPA from a fish source), StuartNatal DuetDHA (250mgDHA), Prenate DHA, Citrical Prenatal + DHA, Citrical Prenatal 90 + DHA.
4. Dietary sources: DHA fortified eggs, salmon, herring, sardines, albacore tuna, walnuts, flaxseed. A 3 oz serving of salmon contains about 600 mg DHA. Albacore tuna has more DHA in it but also potentially more mercury.

If you are on blood thinners or have any type of blood clotting disorder, you should not use fish oil supplements.

There is some concern about mercury and PCB contamination in fish and subsequently fish oil supplements. Fish oil supplements are supposed to be mercury-free, but because they are supplements they are not regulated by the FDA.

Omega 3 fatty acids will pass through your breastmilk to your baby. Even if you do not take a DHA supplement or consume it in your diet, your breastmilk is still healthier than any formula on the market. If you choose not to breastfeed, or wean your baby, there are certain formulas you can choose that are enhanced with DHA. You can always talk to your pediatrician if you have further questions.