

Heart-healthy Omega-3 Oils

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Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in the United States for both men and women. One simple way to improve heart health is to incorporate fish into your meals twice a week. Heart healthy fish contain little saturated fat and offers beneficial omega-3 fatty acids. They are called essential fatty acids because they are needed for normal growth and development however your body can't produce them; you have to get them from your diet. While increased dietary fat is often associated with cardiovascular problems, omega-3 fatty acids actually decrease heart disease risks.

Heart healthy fish such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, tuna, sturgeon, anchovies and salmon contains two kinds of omega-3 fats, eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). According to the American Heart Association omega-3s provide heart protection in the following areas:

- Decrease risk of arrhythmias (irregular heart rhythm)
- Decrease triglyceride and "bad" LDL cholesterol
- Decrease growth rate of plaque build up inside artery walls
- Lower blood pressure (slightly)

Research indicates that omega-3s are also beneficial in decreasing inflammation throughout the body which can be helpful for conditions such as arthritis, allergies, asthma, dementia, and lupus.

Fish oil capsules are also an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids. Studies suggest one gram of EPA+DHA a day may lower the overall risk of death from heart disease. Supplements can vary in concentration of EPA and DHA so look for milligrams per serving on the label then check the serving size. One gram of EPA+DHA a day from a supplement is the equivalent of two 4oz servings of fish per week. If you find choosing a fish oil supplement confusing consult with a pharmacist, they can help you choose a brand of high-quality and purity.

Another way to increase omega-3 fats in your diet is to add plant sources of this healthy oil. Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) is a third kind of omega-3 found in foods such as: walnuts, canola oil, soybean oil, kale, flaxseeds, broccoli and wheat germ. ALA can also be taken as a supplement usually in the form of flaxseed oil. Experts say that DHA and EPA from fish and fish oil have better established health benefits than ALA omega 3s.

Because omega-3 fats have the ability to thin blood, high doses of supplements should be taken only under a doctor's supervision. Check with your doctor before taking supplements if you use aspirin or medication to reduce blood clotting.