

Your heart health needs

by Dr. Jamie McManus



Whenever people ask me which supplements they should be taking, at the top of the list are the omega-3 fatty acids. Since this is the month for love and heart health, I thought I'd take the time to explain the importance of omega-3 for our most poetic (and important) of organs.

You probably know that there are fats you need to avoid (like trans fats and saturated fats) if you want to have a healthy heart, but you may not know that there are other fats that you actually NEED to have in your diet to help your heart be healthy.

The omega-3 fatty acids (also known as EPA/DHA) are considered “essential” because you must get them in your diet—our bodies do not make them, so if your diet does not provide adequate amounts of these fats you may be missing these necessary nutrients. While the omega-3 fatty acids are important for many bodily functions, they are incredibly important for heart health.

Researchers have been investigating the link between omega-3s and heart health; let's take a look at some key findings:

- Omega-3 fatty acids may help you lower your overall cholesterol levels. In fact, not only do they seem to reduce cholesterol in general, they also may help to raise HDL (the “good” cholesterol) levels. Other studies have shown that supplementing with 2 to 4 grams of omega-3s also may lower triglyceride levels.
- As you may know, chronic inflammation in our bodies is bad and can be especially harmful to our heart. The omega-3 fatty acids also have a role to play in inflammation, where they help to produce chemicals in our bodies (called eicosanoids) that may reduce inflammation.
- Other studies have shown the omega-3s were able to help lower blood pressure, reduce blood clotting,

and even seem to reduce irregular heartbeats.

- Another study has shown that eating at least one to two servings a week of fish (that's rich in omega-3 fatty acids) appears to reduce the risk of heart disease, particularly sudden cardiac death.
- A new report titled Smart Prevention —Health Care Cost Savings Resulting from the Targeted Use of Dietary Supplements suggests that if people at high risk for Coronary Heart Disease would take 1 gram of EPA+DHA a day that the cost saving (from prevented heart disease) would be more than \$480 million dollars per year in health care cost savings.

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends eating one to two servings of cold-water fish every week. Since so many people have a hard time making that goal, another recommendation is supplementing with at least 1 gram per day of EPA+DHA.

The best way to take care of your heart is to eat healthfully, avoid fast foods, get to a BMI of 25 or below, become more active, and add at least a gram of omega-3 fatty acids in your diet, through a healthy diet including fish and/or supplementation.