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videos

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

According to two of the most credible nutrition authorities, the World Health Organization and the European Food Safety Authority, we should get at least a half a percent of our calories from the short-chain omega-3 ALA. That's easy: My [Daily Dozen](#) recommendation for one tablespoon of ground flaxseeds takes care of that. Our body can then take that

short-chain omega-3 and elongate it into the long-chain omega-3s EPA and DHA found in fish fat.

Why not supplement with omega-3 fish oil or just eat fish, though?

Fish oil pills have grown into a multibillion-dollar industry, thanks in part to the American Heart Association's recommendation that individuals at high risk for heart disease should ask their physicians about omega-3 fish oil supplementation. But what does the science say?

A systematic review and meta-analysis published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* looked at all the best randomized clinical trials evaluating the effects of omega-3 fats on life span, cardiac death, sudden death, heart attack, and stroke. These included studies not only on fish oil supplements, but also on the effects of advising people to eat more oily fish. Overall, the researchers found no protective benefit for overall mortality, heart disease mortality, sudden cardiac death, heart attack, or stroke.

After putting all the studies together, researchers concluded there was no longer justification for the use of omega-3s in everyday clinical practice.

Fish oil, even purified ("distilled") fish oil, has been found to be contaminated with PCBs and other pollutants. The concentration of dioxin-like pollutants in fish oil is so high that when taken as directed, salmon, herring, and tuna oils can cause the average person's overall daily intake to exceed the tolerable limit of toxicity. This may help explain the studies that found adverse effects of fish consumption on cognitive function in adults and children.

Thankfully, you can get the benefits without the risks by getting long-chain omega-3s from algae instead, which is where the fish primarily get it from to begin with. By getting EPA and DHA directly from the source at the bottom of the food chain, you don't have to worry about pollutant contamination. In fact, the algae used for supplements are just grown in tanks and never even come in contact with the ocean.

The information on this page has been compiled from Dr. Greger's research. Sources for each video listed can be found by going to the video's page and clicking on the Sources Cited tab. References may also be found at the back of his books.

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Should We Take DHA Supplements to Boost Brain Function?

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Is Fish “Brain Food” for Older Adults?

Why has fish consumption been associated with cognitive impairment and loss of executive function?

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