

Omega-3 Fats

What are omega-3 fats?

Omega-3 fats are healthy fats. It's important to get them from food because our bodies can't make them on their own.

The 3 main types of omega-3 fats are:

- eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA)
- docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)
- alpha-linolenic acid (ALA)

This handout tells you about omega-3 fats, which foods contain them, and how to get enough.

Why are omega-3 fats important?

EPA and DHA

Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) have many health benefits:

- lower your risk for heart disease
- reduce blood pressure
- help keep blood vessels (arteries) from becoming stiff
- help prevent blood clots
- help lower triglycerides (fats in your blood)
- reduce inflammation
- support brain and eye development in infants and during pregnancy

More studies are needed to know how omega-3 fats might help rheumatoid arthritis, mental health conditions, or other diseases.

ALA

Foods higher in alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) are a source of healthy fat. However, they don't improve your health as much as foods with EPA and DHA. ALA is changed to EPA and DHA in our bodies, but this happens in very small amounts.

How much omega-3 do I need?

All healthy adults, adults at risk for heart disease, and adults with heart disease need the amounts below:

	Every day	Every week
EPA + DHA	200–500 mg	1400–3500 mg
ALA	1100–1600 mg	8000–11000 mg

Where can I get omega-3 fats?

The best way to get omega-3 fats is from food.

EPA and DHA

All fish have some EPA and DHA, but fatty fish are the best sources:

- Arctic char
- mackerel
- sardines
- herring
- salmon
- trout



Vegetable sources of EPA and DHA: kelp and seaweed (wakame)



ALA

ALA is found in plant foods:

- Nuts: walnuts
- Seeds: flaxseed, chia seeds, hemp seeds
- Oils: canola, soybean, walnut, flaxseed
- Other: soybean products

Some foods may be fortified with EPA, DHA, or ALA: eggs, milk, yogurt, margarine, and juice.



Where can I find omega-3 fats on the food label?

Some food labels list omega-3 fats. Check the Nutrition Facts table on the package to find out how much omega-3 fat is in 1 serving of the product. Omega-3 amounts on the Nutrition Facts table are in grams (g): 1 g = 1000 mg.

Nutrition Facts	
Per ¼ can (55 g)	
Calories 70	% Daily Value*
Fat 3 g	4 %
Saturated 0.5 g	3 %
+Trans 0 g	
Polyunsaturated 0.7 g	
Omega-6 0.1 g	
Omega-3 0.6 g	
Monounsaturated 1.5 g	
Carbohydrate 25 g	
Fibre 3 g	11 %
Sugars 15 g	15 %
Protein 8 g	
Cholesterol 10 mg	
Sodium 75 mg	3 %
Potassium 300 mg	6 %
Calcium 300 mg	23 %
Iron 1 mg	6 %
*5% or less is a little, 15% or more is a lot	

Increase omega-3 fats in your diet

The best way to increase omega-3 fats in your diet is to choose fish more often.



Eat at least two 3½ oz (100 g) servings of fish each week. Choose fatty fish from the Food sources table on this page.

If you don't eat fish, you can get some EPA and DHA from eating kelp and seaweed (wakame).

You can get ALA from nuts, oils, and soy products. Foods higher in ALA are sources of healthy fat, but they don't lower your heart disease risk as much as fatty fish.

Food sources of omega-3 fats

EPA/DHA (mg)	
Fish (3½ oz, 100 g, cooked)	
Herring, kippered	2150
Salmon, farmed	2150
Herring	2000-2130
Salmon, wild	1840
Sardines, canned	980-1400
Herring, pickled	1390
Mackerel	1200
Salmon, canned	1160
Trout	940
Arctic char	900
Mussels	780
Sole	300
Shrimp	280
Tuna, light, canned in water	270
Halibut	240
Cod	160
Other sources	
Omega-3 eggs, 2	150–250
Seaweed (wakame), raw (½ cup/125 mL)	80
Meatless fish, 3½ oz (100 g)	30

1000 mg = 1 gram



What about omega-3 supplements?

Talk to your dietitian, doctor, or pharmacist before starting an omega-3 supplement.

- Choose supplements with EPA and DHA, not ALA.
- Look for a Drug Identification Number (DIN) or a Natural Product Number (NPN) on the bottle. These numbers tell you that Health Canada has reviewed and approved the product.
- Fish oil supplements rarely contain mercury.
- If you're allergic to fish or shellfish, or don't eat them for other reasons:
 - Look for kelp- or seaweed-based supplements with EPA and DHA.
 - Avoid supplements made with fish oil or krill oil.
 - Read the ingredient list on the package.
- **Omega-3-6-9 supplements are not better than omega-3 supplements.** No health benefits have been shown from taking supplements with omega-6 and omega-9 fats.

If your fish oil supplements have a fishy aftertaste, try:

- storing them in the freezer and taking them when they're frozen
- using a supplement with a special coating; look for the words enteric coating on the label
- taking the supplement with a meal

How much EPA and DHA do supplements really have?

Below is an example of a fish oil supplement with EPA and DHA omega-3 fats.

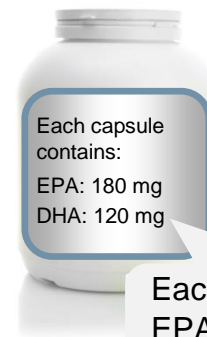
Front of the bottle



The 1000 mg (1 g) on the front of this label is the total amount of the EPA, DHA, and other fats in each capsule.

On a supplement bottle, 1000 mg = 1 g

Back of the bottle



Look at the back of the label to find how much EPA and DHA are actually in each capsule.

Each capsule contains:
EPA: 180 mg
DHA: 120 mg

Add the EPA and DHA together:

180 mg (0.18 g) EPA
+ 120 mg (0.12 g) DHA
= 300 mg (0.3 g) total EPA and DHA
in each capsule

Cautions:

- Supplements with fish liver oil (such as cod liver oil) may have high amounts of vitamins A and D. These vitamins can build up in your body and become toxic for some people. If you're pregnant, or planning to get pregnant, don't take omega-3 supplements that have vitamin A.
- People who take blood thinners should talk to their doctor before taking omega-3 supplements.

Does eating fish have risks?

Some fish have higher amounts of heavy metals like mercury.

Fish higher in mercury

Limit how much of these you eat. Women who are pregnant, planning to get pregnant or breastfeeding are advised to avoid these fish.



- escolar
- shark
- marlin
- swordfish
- orange roughy
- tuna, fresh or frozen

Other fish: Adults can safely eat at least 2 servings a week of fish not on the list above. When you buy canned tuna, **choose light tuna** instead of albacore (white) tuna.

Do you eat fish caught in Alberta?

If so, check out the local fish advisory online at <https://mywildalberta.ca/fishing/advisories-corrections-closures/fish-consumption-advisory.aspx>

Ask your healthcare provider for more information about fish safety.

For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/nutrition.
- Call, text, or chat with 211 Alberta (<https://ab.211.ca/>) to find out about financial benefits, programs, and services.

Notes

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