

Essential Fatty Acids and your Health

Underlying all chronic disease is inflammation. We respond to the types of oil and fats we put in our body in either an inflammatory or anti-inflammatory manner. The foods we eat breakdown into essential fatty acids and fall into one of three pathways, two of which are beneficial and one of which is inflammatory. Aspirin, for example, works by blocking the inflammatory pathway; unfortunately it also blocks one of the beneficial pathways as well which is one of the reasons it has the side effect of damaging your stomach lining. A better option would be to choose foods that shift your pathways away from inflammation and avoid the ones that encourage inflammation. Modifying which oils and fats we eat has a significant impact on a variety of health problems such as heart disease, arthritis, eczema, migraines, menstrual cramps, chronic pain and even cancer. It is a key factor for achieving optimal health.

There are two types of essential fatty acids, omega-3 and omega-6. In modern Western society, the quantity of omega-3 fatty acids we consume are 1/5 the level found in traditional diets, hence the high rates of heart disease, arthritis and cancer. Western diets are high in omega-6, specifically arachidonic acid which is in meat, dairy and eggs. Another type of omega-6, called gamma linolenic acid, on the other hand, is anti-inflammatory and especially beneficial for menstrual disorders, arthritis, diabetes and skin disorders.

Omega-3	Omega-3	Omega-6	Omega-6
BENEFICIAL ~EPA/DHA~	BENEFICIAL ~alpha linolenic acid~	BENEFICIAL ~gamma linolenic acid~	INFLAMMATORY ~arachidonic acid~
salmon mackerel sardine herring anchovy pilchard butterfish lake trout tuna	flax seed hemp seed pumpkin seed soy walnuts kale collard chard parsley	spirulina, microalgae borage seed oil black currant seed oil evening primrose oil	meat dairy eggs peanuts

Because fish nowadays contain toxic heavy metals and contaminants, it would be best if the majority of your omega-3 fatty acids came from vegetarian sources or contaminant-free fish oil supplements. Farmed raised fish (i.e. Atlantic salmon) are fed corn rather than the algae they eat in nature and therefore do not contain the heart healthy benefits of omega-3. Grass fed beef contain some beneficial fatty acids but are still high in arachidonic acid.

Incorporating anti-inflammatory essential fatty acids into your diet will not only improve your current health problems but prevent future ones as well!