

# FISH OIL (OMEGA-3) FAQ

Looking for the fish oil calculator? You don't need it any longer, as we've greatly simplified things for you. (You're welcome.) Refer to our general dose recommendations below.

## **Q: Where do Omega-3 fatty acids come from?**

A: Omega-3 fatty acids are found in the green leaves of plants, like grass, phytoplankton, algae and seaweed. This is the food that OUR food is designed to eat, which makes grass-fed beef, pastured organic eggs, and most importantly, certain types of fish (wild-caught fish and fish lower on the food chain, like herring, anchovy, sardine and mackerel) are good, natural sources of omega-3's. Unfortunately, due to poor meat quality, and over-consumption of fast foods, processed foods, and vegetable oils, most of our diets are lacking in these essential fatty acids (and overly rich in pro-inflammatory omega-6 fatty acids).

## **Q: So why can't I just eat grass or seaweed to get my omega-3's?**

A: First, you don't have the ability to digest grass properly. Moving on, omega-3's are a family of fatty acids, and the "parent" molecule is called alpha-linolenic acid (abbreviated as LNA or ALA). The ALA from plants is converted by animals or fish to the potent anti-inflammatory omega-3's called EPA and DHA by a long conversion process (see the discussion of ALA from plant seeds below). The ALA itself is not actually anti-inflammatory, and only a small percentage of ALA can be converted to EPA and DHA. Fish (and to a much lesser degree, land animals) do the metabolic work to convert the plant-based ALA into concentrated EPA and DHA. Fish oil is *already* a concentrated source of EPA and DHA, which is why fish oil has such potent anti-inflammatory properties.

## **Q: Why can't I get my omega-3's from flax?**

A: There are countless problems with getting your omega-3's from this particular plant source. It requires an extremely inefficient conversion process – meaning your body has to do a lot of work to get the EPA and DHA you want out of the kind of fat found in flax (ALA). And the conversion pathway is fraught with difficulties that can, in fact, lead to MORE inflammation – the exact opposite of the intention. Finally, even if everything works perfectly, the amount of EPA and DHA you can actually *convert* from flax is so small it practically doesn't count. (By the way, the story is the same whether you're talking about flax, chia, hemp or echium.) Just stick with your fish oil.

## **Q: Why do I need EPA and DHA?**

A: You only need a quick web search for this one, because there is a *wealth* of information on this subject. Fish oil is not a magic bullet, but there are an infinite number of well-documented benefits for a whole host of lifestyle diseases and conditions. The short answer is that EPA and DHA are specific types of polyunsaturated omega-3 fatty acids. Your body cannot produce these fatty acids – you must get them from the food you eat, or via supplementation. EPA and DHA are natural anti-inflammatory agents, and as such, play a role in brain health, heart health, protection against cancer, Alzheimer's and depression, improvement of skin conditions like psoriasis and acne, fetal brain development, inflammatory bowel disorders, and arthritis, to name a few.

Our typical diets are rich in another type of pro-inflammatory polyunsaturated fatty acid called omega-6. When our dietary intake of omega-6's far exceeds our intake of omega-3's, our bodies experience a wide range of negative consequences, all with the underlying cause of increased systemic inflammation. Minimizing dietary intake of

omega-6 fatty acids, and supplementing your intake of omega-3 fatty acids, helps to reduce inflammation, and the wide range of downstream effects.

**Q: Is there an ideal EPA to DHA ratio?**

A: This isn't particularly important – but a supplement in the general neighborhood of 1:1 would be a good find. DHA converts to EPA easier than vice versa, so if you *had* to choose, choose a high-DHA oil.

**Q: What else should I look for in a fish oil brand?**

A: First and most importantly, squeaky-clean ingredients. This means your fish oil should be free of soy (including lecithin), dairy, wheat, rice, sweeteners or other artificial ingredients

Then, look at the EPA and DHA amounts per serving – that's far more important than the “total fish oil” amount. A concentrated source means you have to take fewer pills or teaspoons a day – it's more efficient, and makes it more likely that you'll actually *take* your recommended dose each day.

Finally, decide whether you want a liquid or capsule. We prefer liquid, because liquid forms are often more concentrated than pills, and don't have the additional ingredients found in capsules or pills with enteric coating. (Some find the coating on fish oil pills irritating, even allergenic.)

**Q: What fish oil brands does The Exercise Coach® recommend?**

A: The brand we take personally is The Exercise Coach® Omegade™. We've tried and researched many other brands, and chose pharmaceutical grade Omegade™ for several reasons:

\* The ingredients are squeaky-clean – no soy, dairy, wheat, sweeteners or other artificial ingredients.

\* It has more EPA and DHA than other high quality brands (1820 mg in 2 tsp. serving).

\* Omegade™ has a smooth texture and great lemon or orange flavor. It's a great way for adults or children to get their daily dose without swallowing more pills.

\* It has TruTG™ (triglyceride form) of fish oil that is the naturally occurring form in foods and in the body and 100% more bio-available than the typical EE form of fish oil.

**Q: Do I have to be worried about mercury levels or other contaminants in fish oil?**

A: In a word, no. The larger the fish, and the higher it is on the food chain, the more potential exposure it has to heavy metals and other contaminants. Fish oil is almost always harvested from small fish like herring, anchovy and sardines, all of which are very low on the food chain. Most high quality fish oil brands are tested to ensure that any mercury or other heavy metal levels are all below detectable levels (.01ppm). In addition, a 2006 ConsumerLab evaluation of 42 commercially available fish oil supplements found that *all* were free of mercury, PCBs and dioxins. Omegade™ meets these standards and is a pharmaceutical grade of fish oil.

**Q: Are there any contraindications for taking fish oil?**

A: Because fish oil capsules have an effect on reducing the stickiness of platelets, it is recommended that if you have any of the following conditions, that you see your physician to discuss whether you should take fish oil capsules:

- You have a bleeding tendency
- You are on blood thinning medication
- You are about to have surgery

Of course, before starting *any* new medication or supplement, it is always a smart idea to consult your physician, right?

**Q: I'm pregnant – is it safe to take fish oil?**

A: First, consult your doctor before starting any medications or supplementation. The general consensus is that EPA, and especially DHA, provide excellent benefits for your baby's neurological and early visual development, and may reduce the risk of pregnancy complications like pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes, post-partum depression and pre-term delivery. Your recommended dose will be different, however... again, check with your doctor to find a range that's healthy for you *and* your baby.

**Q: How much fish oil should I take?**

A: **Our general recommendations are to aim for around 2-4 grams of EPA/DHA per day.** However, if you eat lots of wild-caught salmon, grass-fed beef and other natural sources of omega-3 fatty acids, *and* generally avoid sources of omega-6 (like vegetable oils, factory-farmed meat, nuts and seeds), you may not need as much or any fish oil supplementation at all.

**Q: I'm pretty inflamed/sick/overweight. Can I take more than you recommend to jump-start results?**

A: **Hear us clearly – you can't fish oil your way out of poor dietary choices, lack of sleep, over-training or any combination of the above.** It's of the utmost important that you get your dietary and lifestyle house in order! More fish oil is not better – and in some instances, can do more harm than good. So make better food choices, get to bed earlier, allow yourself more time to rest and recover and do your best to minimize stress – and don't rely on *any* pill or supplement to fix your stuff.

**Q: How do I take fish oil?**

A: Most importantly, always take fish oil with meals. This reduces the chance of stomach upset or “fish burps”. We think about sandwiching our fish oil inside a meal – one bite of food, then our fish oil, followed by the rest of our meal. And split your dose up throughout the day, especially if you're at a 0.5 factor or above. Finally, if you're new to fish oil, ramp up to your recommended dose slowly.

**Q: What happens if I take too much fish oil?**

A: Your digestive tract will tell you – and things will “move along” far too quickly for comfort. We can't imagine the moderate doses we recommend (no more than 4 grams of EPA/DHA per day) would cause digestive upset, however... unless your fish oil was of poor quality, with a low concentration of EPA/DHA. (Yet another reason to stick with a high quality, highly concentrated brand.)

**Q: How do I store fish oil?**

A: In your refrigerator (if liquid form) or in a cool, dark place if in pill form. If your pills don't have a dark capsule coating and/or come in a light colored bottle, this is especially important. Fish oil reacts to light and heat, and can turn rancid. Rancid fish oil – obvious based on the smell – should be *immediately* discarded.

**Q: Do I count my fish oil as calories or fat grams?**

A: First, why on earth are you counting calories? While different folks have different answers for this question, we say no. The way your body uses EPA and DHA is different than other types of fat – the eicosanoid biosynthetic pathway, the brain, and the retina have first dibs, and EPA and DHA are typically used in these pathways as opposed to being used as “fuel”.

**Q: What about krill oil?**

A: While some folks make grand claims about krill oil, we think it's way too expensive, and isn't a very concentrated source of EPA and DHA, and so just isn't worth the additional cost. Stick with your fish oil.

**Q: What about cod liver oil? I heard it's a good source of fish oil PLUS vitamins A and D.**

A: There have been some concerns about the level of vitamins A and D in cod liver oil. The excessively high levels of vitamin A can prove toxic at the levels our calculator recommends for your ideal EPA/DHA dose. In addition, the amount of vitamin D in cod liver oil is pretty low – meaning you're not really getting a *good* boost of D. Plus there are some smart folks who believe that high levels of vitamin A will limit the effectiveness of vitamin D, which could potentially lead to a D deficiency. We sometimes take CLO, but only at smaller doses (i.e. our maintenance dose)

In summary, if you want to stick with the cod liver oil, do NOT use our Fish Oil Calculator for your dosage recommendations. A better choice, in our opinion, would be to stick with fish oil.