

Omega-3 fatty acids, fish oil, alpha-linolenic acid

Natural Standard® Patient Monograph, Copyright © 2011 (www.naturalstandard.com). All Rights Reserved. Commercial distribution prohibited. This monograph is intended for informational purposes only, and should not be interpreted as specific medical advice. You should consult with a qualified healthcare provider before making decisions about therapies and/or health conditions.

Background



Dietary sources of omega-3 fatty acids include fish oil and certain plant/nut oils. Fish oil contains both docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), while some nuts (English walnuts) and vegetable oils (canola, soybean, flaxseed/linseed, olive) contain alpha-linolenic acid (ALA).

There is evidence from multiple studies supporting intake of recommended amounts of DHA and EPA in the form of dietary fish or fish oil supplements lowers triglycerides, reduces the risk of death, heart attack, dangerous abnormal heart rhythms, and strokes in people with known cardiovascular disease, slows the buildup of atherosclerotic plaques ("hardening of the arteries"), and lowers blood pressure slightly. However, high doses may have harmful effects, such as an increased risk of bleeding. Although similar benefits are proposed for alpha-linolenic acid, scientific evidence is less compelling, and beneficial effects may be less pronounced.

Some species of fish carry a higher risk of environmental contamination, such as with methylmercury.

Synonyms

NS_patient-fishoil

Portions of this document last updated:

Dec. 1, 2010

