

WHFoods: Omega 3 fats

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Omega 3 fats

Are you confused about how much fat, and what type of fat, you should be eating? During the past 20 years, the amount and type of dietary fat that should be present in a healthy diet has been the source of tremendous controversy. While it is true that eating too much of the wrong kinds of fat (namely saturated fats and partially hydrogenated fats) can increase our chances of becoming obese or developing heart disease or cancer, it is also true that we need significant amounts of fat, especially the omega 3 fats, to keep us healthy.

Omega 3 fats play an important role in the production of powerful hormone-like substances called prostaglandins. Prostaglandins help regulate many important physiological functions including blood pressure, blood clotting, nerve transmission, the inflammatory and allergic responses, the functions of the kidneys and gastrointestinal tract, and the production of other hormones. In addition, a diet that is rich in omega 3 fats helps maintain the proper function of cell membranes. Researchers believe that diets containing large amounts of saturated or hydrogenated fats produce cell membranes that are hard and lack fluidity. On the other hand, diets rich in omega 3 fats produce cell membranes with a high degree of fluidity. It is now believed that a high dietary intake of omega 3 fats may help in the prevention of the many health conditions including cancer, heart disease, depression, asthma, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, obesity, and high blood pressure.

To date, the Institute of Medicine at the National Academy of Sciences has not yet issued any Dietary Reference Intakes for omega 3 fats. Recently, however, the National Institutes of Health recommended that people consume at least 2% of their total daily calories as omega 3 fats. To meet this recommendation, a person consuming 2000 calories per day should eat at least 2 grams of omega 3 fats. Many nutrition experts believe that this recommendation is not high enough, and suggest, instead, that people consume at least 4% of their total calories (approximately 4 grams) as omega 3 fats. This goal can be easily met by adding just two foods to your diet: flaxseeds and wild-caught salmon. Two tablespoons of flaxseeds contain 3.5 grams of omega 3 fats, while a 4 ounce piece of salmon contains 1.5 grams of omega 3 fats. For variety, try incorporating these

other omega-3 rich foods into your diet: kale, collard greens, Brussel sprouts, walnuts, salmon, scallops, halibut, shrimp, and soybeans.