

**DIET** CONFUSED ABOUT THE BENEFITS OF OMEGA-3 OILS? **YVONNE GORDON** EXPLAINS WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY WE NEED THEM

# Are you getting well-oiled?

**W**e've all heard about the health benefits of fish oils and omega-3s – they can fight everything from ageing and poor memory to heart disease and depression. But there's so much new omega-3 related information and advertising in the marketplace, it can be confusing as to how much omega-3s you need to take to benefit health – or how to take them.

In the past few years, countless scientific studies have shown how omega-3s can improve the health of our hearts, brains and joints and scientists have also discovered that they can improve behavioural and learning problems in children with conditions such as ADD and ADHD. One study of children with developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD) saw improvements in reading, spelling and behaviour when they were given regular fish oil supplements. However, despite its important role in brain development, children here aren't getting enough omega-3 in their diet, according to the analysis of the National Children's Food Survey. Conducted on behalf of dairy manufacturer Dairygold, the survey found that 98 per cent of children in Ireland are not getting their recommended daily intake of long chain omega-3.

## So what are omega-3s?

The brain, which is made up of more than 60 per cent fat, needs certain oils to work properly and some of these are omega-3 essential fatty acids. They are essential to human health, however, as they cannot be made by the body, so they have to come

from the foods we eat, such as fish and certain plant oils, and supplements.

## What do they do?

Omega-3 fatty acids are found in every cell in the body and they help regulate all biological functions, including the cardiovascular, reproductive, immune and nervous systems. They help maintain good health, promote brain and vision development and protect against disease.

So far, studies suggest omega-3 can potentially benefit conditions such as eczema, asthma and inflammation, age-related blindness and Alzheimer's disease and can prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease and arthritis. In adults, deficiencies in omega-3 has been linked with dyslexia, depression, memory problems, allergies, inflammatory diseases and diabetes.

## Why take more?

Omega-3 levels in our bodies have decreased due to dietary changes – our ancestors ate a mix of meat, fruits and vegetables rich in

omega-3s, but the growth of processed and convenience foods in our modern diet means we no longer eat as much of these fats as we used to.

**S**tudies have shown that people who eat a Mediterranean diet, which includes food rich in omega-3 fatty acids like wholegrains, fresh fruits, vegetables, fish and olive oil, are less likely to develop heart disease. Eskimos also consume high amounts of omega-3 fatty acids from fatty fish and, as a result, have lower cholesterol and suffer less from depression.

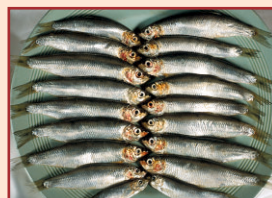


Omega-3 fatty acids are essential for general health



Fatty acids are less prevalent in modern, Western diets, due to a reliance on fast food

## SOURCES OF OMEGA-3



### Fish

Oily fish such as fresh tuna, halibut, herring, kipper, mackerel, salmon, sardines, scallops, shrimp, snapper and trout are the best source of omega-3. Experts recommend eating two portions of fish a week, one of which should be an oily fish

### Fish oils

Fish oil supplements such as cod liver oil come in liquid or capsules. Make sure these are from established companies as some products contain metals such as mercury. Some experts recommend 450mg of fish oil omega-3 for adults, 200mg for children.

### Nuts, herbs and seeds

Cloves, flax seeds, mustard seeds, oregano,

pumpkin seeds, soybeans, tofu and walnuts

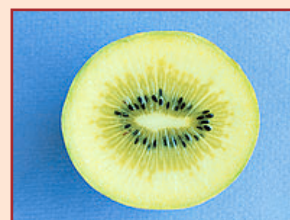
### Fruit and vegetables

Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage, green beans, kale, Romaine lettuce, strawberries, spinach and squash

### Fortified products

Some omega-3-enriched products, including eggs, milk, spreads and bread, contain small quantities of omega-3 fats. However, you may have to eat a large quantity of them to meet recommended daily allowances and some contain high amounts of salt.

Amounts of omega-3 vary between foods. This is a general guide – consult your doctor to discuss your diet before making any changes.



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