

Ask Your Pharmacist

What are fish oils, and how do they improve our health? | Matthew Murray

Fish oil supplements, also known as omega-3 fatty acids, have been increasing in popularity over the last few years due to greater understanding of their innumerable health benefits. Fish oils provide nutrients, called omega-3 fatty acids that are essential to our body's many cellular functions. Fatty acids from fish oils contain large amounts of the two active omega-3's, which are abbreviated EPA and DHA. Unfortunately, in this country we do not generally consume enough of these fatty acids in our diet, which is why supplementation is needed.

EPA and DHA, the two active omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oil have many positive health outcomes. When taken appropriately, omega-3's provide a natural way to lower your risk for cardiovascular diseases such as high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. Studies have also shown improvement in these other health conditions; age-related macular degeneration, dry eyes, obesity, dyslexia, and rheumatoid arthritis. Younger children and adolescents can also greatly benefit, as these nutrients ensure proper development and may help with attention deficit disorder and autism. It is important to note, that as with any health supplement, one must consult with their pharmacist or physician before starting or stopping any new medication or supplement. Fish oil

can decrease the time it takes for blood to clot and shouldn't be used with blood thinning medications without the supervision of a health care professional.

The quality of your fish oil supplement is also very important. High quality fish oils will contain much more of the active ingredients, EPA and DHA. Common side effects such as fish-tasting burps or "fishy repeat," are virtually eliminated with these specialized supplements. The highest quality supplements pass and exceed international standardized testing, as the United States does not require many of these tests. Good fish oil supplements are also eco-friendly, and will only use the most appropriate and abundant fish. It is important to ask your pharmacist about the quality of their supplements. Many of these higher quality supplements are only sold by health care professionals, and are not available at supermarkets or even chain drug stores. As the United States does little to regulate supplements, a pharmacist's recommendation is critical to obtaining a good quality product. It is helpful to seek a pharmacy that specializes in these higher quality supplements. Most high-end manufacturers will provide samples, because they are confident you will notice the difference, so be sure to ask your pharmacist for some samples to try.

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