



Essential fats: Omega 3 to Omega 6 ratio

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Switching the oils we use in our diets is one of the easiest things we can do, and it can make an immediate and huge difference on the systemic inflammation in our bodies.

There are two essential fatty acids that are required from our diet, as they cannot be produced by our body; alpha-linolenic acid, which is an Omega 3 fatty acid, and linoleic acid, which is an Omega 6 fatty acid.

They are the precursors to prostaglandins, thromboxanes, eicosanoids and leukotrienes which have widespread hormonal functions in the body.

Omega 6 fatty acids are very plentiful, and are found in plant oils, nuts, seeds and grains, and as well as in conventional meats that have been fed grain rather than grass.

Most people consume far too much Omega 6 relative to Omega 3 - a ratio of about 20 to 1 when the ratio for optimal health should be about 4 to 1.

Too much Omega 6 interferes with the ability to process Omega 3, as well as it increases inflammation, blood clotting and blood pressure among other things.

Too much omega 6 triggers the COX 2 inflammatory pathway in the body (ever heard of drugs called Cox 2 Inhibitors, like Vioxx or Celebrex?) Systemic body inflammation is not a drug deficiency, but rather is caused largely by imbalances in the omega 3 to 6 ratio.

Because inflammation is now known to be the root cause of so many chronic diseases, such as heart disease or Alzheimer's, unless there is a specific reason to the contrary, one should NOT actively seek out extra sources of Omega 6.

In fact, we should try to avoid them - especially polyunsaturated vegetable oils such as corn, soy, sunflower, peanut, safflower, canola, grape-seed etc., as in addition to being too high in omega 6 fats, they are heavily processed and rancid when we buy them.

Omega 6 oils are by definition polyunsaturated oils, meaning they are very unstable and go rancid when exposed to light and heat. They should not be sold in clear glass bottles at room temperature like they usually are, and clearly we should not be cooking with them!

Instead it is important to ingest more Omega 3s. Omega 3s are critical to brain and nerve development in children, brain and nerve maintenance in adults, and are said to have anti-inflammatory properties as they trigger the Cox 1 pathway in the body.

Animal sources of Omega 3s include fatty fish like wild salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies, sable fish, oysters, shrimp, eel, and roe. Pastured meats, poultry, eggs and dairy have far more omega 3 than grain fed. Fish oil is also a good supplement source of DHA and EPA.

Plant sources like ground flax or chia seeds, or cold pressed flax oil can work if one has the enzyme to convert them to the useable form. Animal sources are already in the usable form, so they are more easily utilized by the body.

Omega 3 oils like fish or flax should be kept in dark bottles in the fridge, and should never be heated, as they are very fragile and will go rancid immediately.

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Enig, Mary; *Know Your Fats: The Complete Primer For Understanding the Nutrition of Fats, Oils, and Cholesterol* Bethesda Press, Silver Spring, MD, 2003
Chek, Paul; *How to Eat, Move and Be Healthy!* Chek Institute, San Diego, CA, 2004.

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