



Nutritional Facts on Essential (Omega) Fatty Acids

Understanding Essential Fatty Acids

Essential fatty acids (EFAs) are types of polyunsaturated fats that the body cannot produce on its own and must be obtained through diet. The two main types of essential fatty acids are Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids. Both play crucial roles in maintaining health, supporting cellular function, and reducing inflammation.

Types of Essential Fatty Acids

1. Omega-3 Fatty Acids

- **Types:** The most beneficial forms include alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).
- **Sources:**
 - **ALA:** Found in flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, and hemp seeds.
 - **EPA and DHA:** Primarily found in fatty fish (such as salmon, mackerel, and sardines) and fish oil supplements.
- **Health Benefits:**
 - Supports heart health by reducing triglycerides and blood pressure.
 - Promotes brain health and cognitive function.
 - May reduce inflammation and lower the risk of chronic diseases.

2. Omega-6 Fatty Acids

- **Types:** The most common form is linoleic acid (LA), which can be converted into arachidonic acid (AA).
- **Sources:**
 - Found in vegetable oils (such as corn, soybean, and sunflower oil), nuts, and seeds.
- **Health Benefits:**
 - Supports skin health and cell structure.
 - Plays a role in the inflammatory response and immune function.

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Nutritional Content of Omega Fatty Acids

- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:**
 - **Calories:** Approximately 9 calories per gram.
 - **Recommended Intake:** The American Heart Association recommends at least two servings of fatty fish per week, which provides about 500 mg of EPA and DHA daily.
- **Omega-6 Fatty Acids:**
 - **Calories:** Approximately 9 calories per gram.
 - **Recommended Intake:** The typical Western diet often exceeds the recommended intake of Omega-6, which is about 5-10% of total daily calories.

Balancing Omega-3 and Omega-6

- **Ideal Ratio:** A balanced intake of Omega-3 to Omega-6 fatty acids is essential for optimal health. The ideal ratio is often cited as 1:4 (Omega-3:Omega-6), but many Western diets have a ratio closer to 1:15 or higher, which may promote inflammation.
- **Tips for Balancing:**
 - Increase Omega-3 intake by consuming more fatty fish, flaxseeds, and walnuts.
 - Reduce Omega-6 intake by limiting processed foods and oils high in Omega-6 fatty acids.

Health Considerations

- **Inflammation:** Omega-3 fatty acids are known for their anti-inflammatory properties, which can help manage conditions such as arthritis, heart disease, and inflammatory bowel disease.
- **Heart Health:** Regular consumption of Omega-3 fatty acids is associated with a lower risk of heart disease, improved cholesterol levels, and better overall cardiovascular health.
- **Mental Health:** Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly DHA, are vital for brain health and may help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.

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