

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Health Benefits Galore

Cardiovascular Health

Fish oil omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to improve heart health in the following ways:

- Reduce the chance of sudden cardiac death. Almost half of all cardiac deaths in the U.S. – about a quarter of a million each year – are attributable to sudden cardiac death.
- Reduce the chance of having a first heart attack. People at high risk of having a heart attack may reduce their chance of a first myocardial infarction (heart attack) by consuming fish oil omega-3s regularly.
- Reduce the risk of stroke. Several studies have shown that people who consume fish regularly are less likely to have a stroke.
- Lower blood triglycerides (fats). Many people, especially those with type 2 or non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus, have high triglycerides, which significantly increases the risk of heart disease. Regular consumption of fish oil omega-3s lowers blood triglyceride levels, especially in people whose triglycerides are above normal levels.
- May increase high-density lipoprotein levels, the so-called “good” cholesterol that reduces the risk of heart disease. This favorable change often occurs in people with high triglycerides or type 2 diabetes, where the risk of heart disease is increased three times or more.
- Reduce the likelihood of blood clots forming in arteries. Blood clots can be fatal. Fish oil omega-3 fatty acids make platelet clumping less likely and reduce the activity or production of several substances that promote clot formation. They may encourage the production of substances that promote the breakdown of clots, as well.
- Improve vascular function. The cells lining the blood vessels are called endothelial cells. They produce substances that maintain blood fluidity and vessel wall muscle tone. Fish oil omega-3 fatty acids inhibit excessive endothelial cell activity that could lead to a heart attack. Omega-3s encourage blood vessel wall relaxation, which improves blood flow and reduces pressure.
- Reduce inflammation. Fish oil omega-3 fatty acids discourage the development of inflammation in blood vessels that frequently accompanies heart disease. Inflammatory conditions stimulate the production of substances involved in clot formation and make artery disease worse. Inflammation increases the risk of heart failure.
- May stabilize atherosclerotic plaques. Recent findings suggest that fish oil omega-3s may increase the stability of atherosclerotic plaques making them less likely to rupture and cause a heart attack.
- Modestly reduce blood pressure. High blood pressure greatly increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. Consuming fish oil omega-3s is associated with small but beneficial reductions in blood pressure.

