

# Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Health Benefits Galore

## Improvements in Clinical Conditions

Omega-3 fatty acids in fish oils have beneficial effects on the symptoms of several health conditions that involve the immune and inflammatory system, intestinal tract, and brain. They appear to have important benefits in type 2 or non-insulin dependent diabetes.

### Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus

- Type 2 diabetes greatly increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and heart attack. However, diabetics who consume fatty fish regularly – once or more per week – are less likely to incur a first heart attack. Mortality from heart disease is also significantly lower among diabetics who do compared with those who do not eat fish.
- Sugar and fat metabolism are impaired in type 2 diabetes. Blood triglyceride (fat) levels are increased while high-density lipoprotein (HDL) levels – the “good cholesterol” – are reduced. Regular consumption of fatty fish or omega-3 fatty acids significantly lowers triglycerides and often raises HDL levels, thereby diminishing the risk of heart disease.
- Omega-3s improve blood circulation, reduce the tendency of blood to clot, improve vascular (blood vessel) function in several ways that reduce the risk of heart disease, and slightly lower blood pressure. These changes favor heart health.

### Inflammatory Conditions

- Omega-3s in fish dampen the production of inflammatory substances produced in rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, asthma, and some skin conditions. They also stimulate the production of substances that counteract inflammation. The result is often an improvement in the symptoms of these conditions, e.g., less soreness or itching, easier breathing, and less swelling. Omega-3s may need to be consumed over a long period before improvements appear.

### Crohn's Disease, Ulcerative Colitis

- These serious intestinal diseases have strong inflammatory responses that may become less severe with the regular consumption of omega-3s from fish. Omega-3s tend to reduce the severity of the symptoms, but do not cure these conditions.

### Mental Function

- Emerging evidence suggests that the regular consumption of omega-3s from fish may be beneficial in reducing the severity of several mental conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, depression, and bipolar disorder. In children, improvements with the consumption of omega-3s have been reported in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia. Caution is warranted because data do not yet permit firm conclusions.

*Written by Joyce A. Nettleton, DSc, RD, ScienceVoice Consulting, Denver, CO.*

*© American Fishermen's Research Foundation, 2003*

\* Always check with your doctor before taking any substances to alleviate any clinical conditions. These statements are provided only for your information and are not intended to treat, cure, prevent, or mitigate any existing health conditions.

