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Many people fall short of recommended omega-3 intake despite proven health benefits

Experts urge greater awareness as deficiencies linked to heart, brain, and eye health risks across all age groups

Thursday, May 29, 2025



Fatty acids known as omega-3 play a key role in human health, according to nutrition experts. These essential nutrients are found in high concentrations in oily fish, certain seeds and nuts, and some vegetable oils. Their regular consumption supports

cardiovascular health, reduces inflammation, and improves brain function. Health authorities recommend increasing the intake of these foods to enhance both short- and long-term quality of life.

Recent data from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) show that one in four Europeans does not meet the recommended omega-3 intake. This gap highlights the need for greater public awareness about the importance of these fatty acids as a first step toward achieving adequate consumption.

Omega-3s are polyunsaturated fats that the human body cannot produce on its own. They must be obtained through diet. Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) is present in plant-based sources such as flaxseed, chia, sesame, hemp seeds, and walnuts. Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) are found mainly in fatty fish, seafood, and marine algae.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a minimum daily intake of 250 mg of EPA and DHA for adults. For children, the minimum is 100 mg per day. Pregnant and breastfeeding women require an additional 200 mg of DHA daily. Despite these guidelines, most people do not consume enough fatty fish or other omega-3-rich foods regularly, which can lead to deficiencies with long-term health consequences.

Experts point out several foods that should be included more often in the diet to maintain recommended omega-3 levels. Oily fish such as salmon, sardines, mackerel, anchovies, herring, horse mackerel, and tuna are rich in EPA and DHA. Eating these fish twice a week can help meet most omega-3 needs. Seeds like flaxseed, chia, sesame, and hemp are notable for their ALA content. Adding a spoonful of these seeds to yogurt or plant-based milk or spreading them on toast with avocado or hummus can make for a healthy breakfast.

Walnuts are among the best plant-based sources of omega-3s. A handful per day is enough to gain their benefits without excessive calorie intake. Walnuts can be eaten as a snack or added to salads for extra texture and flavor. Vegetable oils such as flaxseed oil, soybean oil, and hemp oil also provide significant amounts of ALA. For example, homemade cakes made with flaxseed oil offer a way to enjoy dessert while supporting health.

Seafood like mussels, oysters, and clams contain lower but still valuable amounts of omega-3s compared to fatty fish. Avocado is another food that offers omega-3s along with potassium and vitamins C, E, and B6.

The benefits of omega-3 fatty acids are well documented across several areas of health. They help lower blood triglyceride levels, regulate blood pressure, prevent arrhythmias, and support vascular elasticity. Omega-3s also reduce clot formation and help maintain healthy cholesterol levels when combined with a balanced diet.

Research links adequate omega-3 intake with lower rates of depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline. These nutrients improve concentration and mental processes in both young people and older adults.

Omega-3s have anti-inflammatory properties that may benefit those with autoimmune or chronic inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus by modulating immune response.

DHA is especially important for eye health because it is a key component of the retina. Sufficient omega-3 intake helps prevent age-related vision problems like macular degeneration and relieves dry eyes—an issue common among people who spend long hours in front of screens.

During pregnancy and breastfeeding, omega-3s are crucial for fetal nervous system development. Adequate DHA intake is associated with better cognitive outcomes in children and reduced risk of premature birth. In childhood, omega-3s have been shown to help manage symptoms of ADHD, improve visual acuity, and prevent allergies.

For those interested in pairing these foods with wine at the table: oily fish pairs well with crisp white wines; dishes featuring seeds or nuts go nicely with light-bodied reds or aromatic whites; walnut-based snacks or salads match well with sparkling wines; vegetable oils used in baking suit off-dry whites; seafood like mussels or oysters pair best with mineral-driven whites; avocado dishes complement fresh rosés or unoaked whites.