



ADVISORY TEAM MEMBER

Top 5 Reasons for Golfers to Eat Omega-3's



Omega-3 fats are one of the latest nutrients causing a buzz in the health and nutrition world. For golfers, they can have some pretty significant benefits, too. With research linking omega-3 fats to reducing risk of heart disease, reducing inflammation, and boosting mental sharpness, what golfer wouldn't want to learn more?

Benefits of Omega-3 Fats

Back in the 1920's, one of the omega-3 fats was discovered and named Vitamin F. The name didn't stick and they were forgotten by many researchers for 50 years. Research started again just 30 years ago and now we know a lot more about these very important fats.

Omega-3 fats play a key role in functions and structures in cells in the body.

- **Brain:** Key building blocks of the brain in development and growth but also learning and IQ.
- **Vision:** Critical throughout life cycle from development of sight to prevention vision disorders as we age.
- **Blood:** Protect the arteries and keeps blood from becoming too thick, allowing it to flow smoothly.
- **Heart:** Maintain steady heart beat and acts as heart's natural pacemaker.
- **Bones:** Help to increase calcium absorption and form bone. Protects cartilage, too.

Omega-3 fats have a key role in reducing inflammation in the body. This is especially important in the heart, but inflammation can happen anywhere in the body and leads to disease and injury.

Two main types of Omega-3 Fats

Alpha-linolenic Acid (ALA): This is a short chain omega-3 fatty acid that is the "parent" of all the fatty acids in the omega-3 family. It is found in canola oil, flaxseeds and flaxseed oil, walnuts, spinach and other leafy green vegetables, other plants, and hemp.

Eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA) and Docosahexaenoic Acid (DHA): EPA and DHA are long chain omega-3 fatty acids. They are found in marine plant sources and fish/fish oil.

ALA is essential to get in the diet. The International Society for the Study of Fatty Acids and Lipids recommends getting 2,200 mg of ALA daily. Research has proven that although ALA is considered to be an essential fatty acid, it does not provide the same benefits that DHA and EPA does.

It was once thought that the body could convert ALA to EPA and DHA, but this conversion happens at such a small rate of less than 1% into EPA and seldom to DHA. "You cannot rely on plant source omega-3s to get the DHA and EPA that the body needs," says Evelyn Tribble, Registered Dietitian and author of *The Ultimate Omega 3 Diet*. She does recommend getting some ground flax seed as often as possible to get the benefits of the ALA omega-3 fats as well as fiber and phytochemicals that flax provides. You can easily add a tablespoon of ground flax seed to cereal, oatmeal, smoothies, pancake or muffin mix, etc.

DHA and EPA are the omega-3 fats that have the most research showing that they are critical to health. Unfortunately, the average American only gets about 9-15% of the levels recommended for health, says Tribole. She recommends a minimum of 650 mg of a combination of EPA and DHA every day (with at least 220 mg of each). If you are pregnant or breastfeeding this goes up to 300 mg minimum for DHA and if you have heart disease it goes up to at least 1000 mg (1 gram) per day of combined DHA/EPA.

The reason most people don't get enough EPA/DHA is that the main source is fish. Americans do not have fish, especially the fatty fishes that are highest, as a staple in their diets. We really need to get 10-12 ounces of high omega-3 fish weekly in order to meet the minimum requirements. For those aiming to get higher than the minimum, fish oil supplements is often the best way to do it. If you are concerned about contaminants, rest assured that mercury and other contaminants in fish are found in the protein of the fish, not the oil. If "fish burping" is an issue, spread the pills out throughout the day or take them at bedtime. Tribole also recommends avoiding taking with coffee or soda and keeping them cold in the refrigerator or freezer.

FISH HIGHEST IN EPA/DHA

Fish (3 oz cooked)	EPA/DHA total
Salmon, Atlantic, farmed	1,830 mg
Anchovies, canned	1,750 mg
Mackerel, Pacific	1,580 mg
Salmon, Atlantic, wild	1,570 mg
Tuna, blue fin	1,280 mg
Trout, farmed	980 mg
Sardines, Atlantic	830 mg
Bass, striped	820 mg
Tuna, white, canned in water	730 mg

Source: Adapted from *The Ultimate Omega-3 Diet* using USDA Nutrient Database

WHAT IS A VEGETARIAN OR NON-FISH LOVER TO DO?

Since DHA/EPA is found mainly in fish and fish oil, it is more difficult for vegetarians to get these vital nutrients. The best vegetarian source is seaweed and mosses. Asian cuisine that includes seaweed salad or seaweed paper has omega-3's. You


can also find supplements of DHA/EPA that are algae-based instead of fish based. Other options are to look for DHA enriched foods. They often have algae based oil. You can also find eggs that are high in DHA, but read labels carefully because some eggs advertise that they are high in omega-3's but they are just high in ALA and not DHA. While new DHA/EPA fortified products appear on grocery shelves daily, pay attention to how much is in the food. Often it is as little as 32 mg (equivalent to a bite of salmon).

Because people are not eating enough fish, many experts recommend taking a supplement containing EPA/DHA. Most experts agree that 1,000 mg (1 gram) per day is optimal for most people. If someone has high triglycerides or high blood pressure, they may want to consider taking 2-3 grams per day. Check with your doctor before you go much above 1 gram because it does thin the blood. If you have a blood clotting disorder or are on a blood thinning medication definitely check with your doctor before you start on even 1 gram per day.

TOP 5 REASONS FOR GOLFERS TO TAKE OMEGA-3'S

- 1. Focus and Concentration.** Golf is a mental game that requires extreme focus. A wide body of research supports the use of omega-3 fats for brain health. The brain is 60% fat and research has found that people who take omega-3 fats regularly have less risk of dementia, better brain function overall, less learning disabilities in children, less depression, and faster learning and thinking.
- 2. Inflammation.** Some inflammation in response to injury is necessary, but it is the chronic inflammation that can raise risk of disease. DHA turn off the gene that makes enzymes that trigger inflammation. EPA inhibits certain body chemicals called cytokines, which actually destroy bone cartilage. Many anti-inflammatory medications can actually increase cytokine activity. Numerous studies have shown benefits of taking omega-3 fats for people with arthritis and other joint pain.
- 3. Heart attack risk.** You have heard of people dropping over on the golf course of a heart attack. We don't want that to happen to anyone! Omega-3 fats lower blood triglyceride levels, lower blood pressure, and overall reduce risk of heart attack and stroke. The main mechanism comes from the fact that omega-3 fats prevent blood clots and prevent the blood from flowing smoothly.
- 4. Exercise-induced asthma.** A study by researchers at the University of Wales showed that people who suffered from exercise-induced asthma were able to reduce their symptoms by supplementing their diet with fish oil. Post exercise lung function improved by 64 percent and use of inhalers went down by 31 percent.

5. Stress. When you are stressed, your brain shuts down. Making that important putt may be the difference between beating your opponent, but if the stress overtakes your ability to focus, you will miss it every time. Omega-3 fats protect against the effects of stress by maintaining good levels of certain brain chemicals like dopamine and reducing negative chemicals like cortisol.

Tribole, who also wrote *Intuitive Eating*, warns that it takes about 12 weeks for omega-3's to get into cell membranes, so don't expect overnight changes once you start getting more omega-3's. She recommends taking omega-3's on a regular basis to experience all of the numerous benefits. She also says that limiting the amount of omega-6 fat in your diet will help the omega-3 work better. Omega-6 fats are found in soybean and many other vegetable oils, mayonnaise, margarine, shortening, butter, meat, and dairy. Choose canola or olive oil only when cooking or baking. 

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