Fish-less omega-3 fatty acids [1]

Dear Alice,

I know that omega-3 fatty acids are good for you and found in fish, but I'm a vegetarian and don't eat fish. Is there another source where I can get them?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Yes, there certainly are! Good sources include:

- Canola and olive oils
- Walnuts
- Ground flaxseed
- Tofu
- Leafy green veggies

There are three main types of omega-3s. Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) are mainly found in fish, whereas alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) is found elsewhere. Good sources of ALA include vegetable oils (such as soybean or canola), nuts (especially walnuts), flax seeds and flaxseed oil, and leafy vegetables (like kale, spinach, and Brussels sprouts). You could try adding some walnuts and flaxseed [2] into your oatmeal, yogurt, or smoothie, and use vegetable oil for cooking or in a salad dressing to top off a leafy veggie. Try using canola oil to make a vegetable stir fry with tofu. Tahini, which is made with sesame seeds, is a great source of omega-3s and can be used to make sauces and dips, such as hummus.

Omega-3s fatty acids are polyunsaturated fatty acids that your body needs for numerous body functions, such as controlling blood clotting and normal brain function. Omega-3s have been shown to help prevent heart disease and possibly stroke, may help control lupus, eczema, and rheumatoid arthritis due to anti-inflammatory properties, and could be protective against certain types of cancer and other conditions.

There is some debate on whether sources of ALA carry the same benefits as fish sources of EPA and DHA. The body converts ALA into EPA and DHA, but not everyone?s body does this well. If you?re not averse to making an exception to your vegetarianism for fish oil, you can
consider taking a fish oil supplement and might want to speak with your health care provider or a registered dietitian before doing so.

Happy eating!

Alice!

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Resources

Medical Services (Morningside)
get balanced! Guide for Healthier Eating (Morningside)
Medical Services (CUMC)
Published date:
Sep 22, 2000
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