



OMEGA 3 FOR VEGETARIANS

Vegetarians may have lower intakes of cholesterol and saturated fat to protect their hearts, but can they get enough omega 3?

what are omega 3s?

Omega 3s are a family of polyunsaturated fatty acids that the body cannot make, so we must obtain them from our diet. As fish is the primary source of the potent omega 3s called DHA and EPA, the bodies of vegetarians need to make these from the alpha linolenic acid (ALA) that exists in plant foods. There's just one problem: a family of omega 6 fats also exists, which compete for the same enzyme that makes it possible for the body to use ALA. Worse, vegetarian diets usually provide 14–20 times more omega 6 than omega 3, putting the odds of enzyme use in favor of omega 6 rather than omega 3.

why is omega 3 important?

Omega 3s get incorporated into the walls of every cell in our bodies. They exert anti-inflammatory effects to prevent or better manage arthritis, asthma, psoriasis, and other inflammatory conditions. They also keep the heart pumping in rhythm and guard against cancer, diabetes, and even depression. In babies, omega 3s are vital for optimal development of the brain and vision.

four ways to get enough

- ▶ Include ALA in your diet on a regular basis. The best sources are chia and flaxseeds (or their oils), purslane seeds, walnuts, soybeans and other legumes, wheat germ, and leafy greens. Some omega 3–enriched eggs can also be used, if acceptable.
- ▶ Avoid fast foods, processed snack foods, fatty meats, and full-fat dairy products. These hide saturated/trans fats, which block the conversion enzyme.
- ▶ Use olive or macadamia oil as your primary cooking oil instead of omega 6–rich vegetable oils such as sunflower, corn, and margarine. Instead, get most of your fats from whole plant foods. Think nuts, seeds, olives, and avocados.
- ▶ Consider taking a direct source of DHA through a microalgae supplement. Algae are the original source of omega 3, which gets incorporated into the flesh of fish.



Nutritionist Sue Radd is the award-winning author of *The Breakfast Book* and coauthor of *Eat To Live*, internationally acclaimed for showing how savvy eating can combat cancer and heart disease and improve well-being. See www.sueradd.com for more nutrition information.