Omega-3 fats

Why are omega-3 fats important?

We all need some fat in our diets, including the essential omega-3 fat alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). We have to consume ALA because our bodies cannot make this nutrient. It is used to make long-chain omega-3 fats, such as eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Omega-3 fats have an important role in supporting eye health, skin health, our immune system, and brain and nerve development.

How can you get enough omega-3 fats?

As a vegan, you can take several steps to ensure that you are getting enough of these essential fatty acids based on recommendations from public health authorities.1,2 The main thing is to ensure that your daily diet includes a really rich source of ALA.3 Examples are provided on page two (see infographic).

Some experts suggest that it is a good idea to aim for a higher daily intake4. Choosing two of the above options every day may help to optimise your omega-3 fat status.

Food ideas

Now that you have an idea of good sources of vegan omega-3 fatty acids, here are some ways to enjoy these plant foods:

- Sprinkle ground linseed (flaxseed) or shelled hemp seeds on overnight oats, porridge or breakfast cereal.
- Stir chia seeds into some fortified yoghurt alternative.
- Use walnuts to add flavour and texture to a salad or press them into peanut butter on toast.
- Blend walnut, linseed (flaxseed) or hemp oils into dips or use them to make salad dressings.

Balancing omega-3 and omega-6 fats

It is helpful to avoid consuming a lot of omega-6 fats, which compete with omega-3 fat and tends to be plentiful in our diets:

- Limit servings of pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds to around 30g (¼ cup).
- Use vegetable (rapeseed) oil as your main cooking oil instead of sunflower, corn or sesame oil.

These are general guidelines about nutrition. If you have concerns about your diet, please talk to your doctor about seeing a dietitian. Discussing the use of supplements with a health professional will help to ensure that they are suitable for you.
**OMEGA-3 FAT**

**MEAL PLANNING TIP:** include one or two of these options in your daily diet to help you get enough omega-3 fat

- **GROUND LINSEED (flaxseed)** tablespoon
- **WALNUTS** 6 halves
- **CHIA SEEDS** tablespoon
- **SHELLED HEMP SEEDS** 2 tablespoons

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**What about supplementation?**

Some public health authorities suggest an EPA and DHA intake of 250 mg per day for adults.\(^1\,^2\) People following a vegan diet consume almost none of these fats from food sources. Although it is not thought to be essential, it is possible for vegans to obtain EPA and DHA from a microalgae supplement. Research is limited, but suggests that this type of supplementation may help to optimise omega-3 fat status.\(^5\) Microalgae supplementation is an alternative approach to doubling your intake of foods rich in omega-3 fats. This is a particularly important consideration during pregnancy, breastfeeding and childhood due to the role of omega-3 fats in brain, nerve and eye development.

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*Omega-3 fats (2023) – The Vegan Society – Page 2 of 2*
Omega-3 fat tips to take away

- Make sure that your daily diet includes a really rich source of vegan omega-3 fats, such as chia seeds, ground linseed, shelled hemp seeds or walnuts.
- Limit servings of pumpkin or sunflower seeds to around 30g (¼ cup).
- Use vegetable (rapeseed) oil as your main cooking oil.
- Consider using a microalgae supplement, particularly during childhood, pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Further information

You might be interested to check out the following webpages at www.vegansociety.com:

- Nutrition overview
- Life stages, including pregnancy, breastfeeding and different age groups

References