

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.

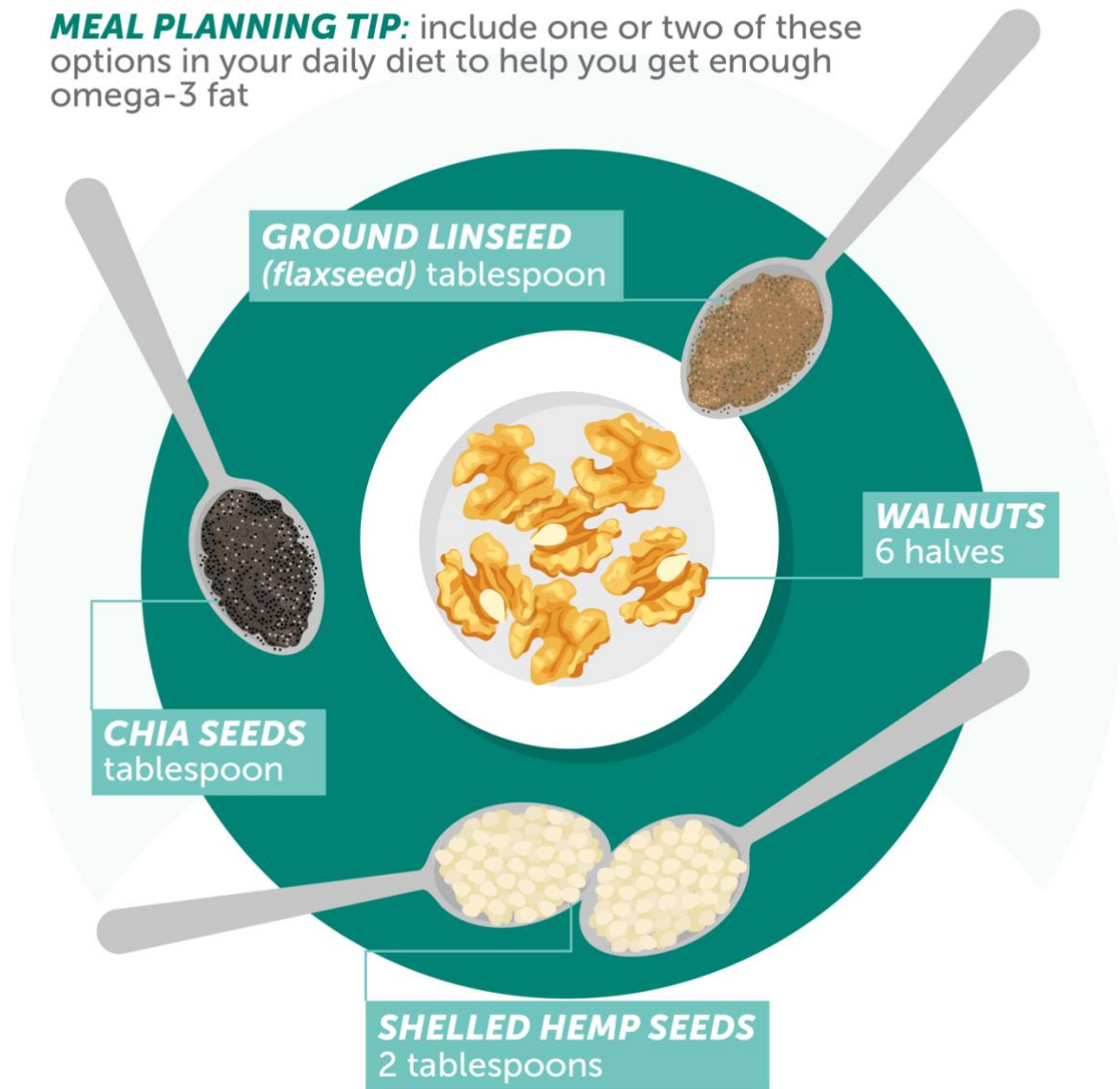
Balancing omega-3 and omega-6 fats

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.

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



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.

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

1. Food and Agriculture Organization (2010)) *Fats and Fatty Acids in Human Nutrition: Report of an Expert Consultation*, FAO Food and Nutrition Paper 91.
2. European Food Safety Authority. *Scientific Opinion on Dietary Reference Values for Fats, Including Saturated Fatty Acids, Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids, Monounsaturated Fatty Acids, Trans Fatty Acids, and Cholesterol* <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/1461> (accessed 05 October 2023)
3. United States Department of Agriculture. *FoodData Central* <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/> (accessed 05 October 2023)
4. Vegan Health, *Daily Needs* <https://veganhealth.org/daily-needs/#Omega-3-Fats> (accessed 05 October 2023)
5. Vegan Health, *Omega-3s: Research* <https://veganhealth.org/omega-3s-part-2/> (accessed 05 October 2023)