



Fats are Essential

The healing benefits of essential fatty acids

In the last year, we've all read news articles trumpeting the alarming statistics about obesity in America. Without a doubt, fat is out, and many people are scrambling onto low-fat diets in response to the news about all the health risks associated with being over-weight and having high levels of cholesterol.

As a result of all this "bad press" many people lose sight of the fact that fats are absolutely necessary substances that perform myriad essential functions in our bodies. They make up 60% of the brain and much of the myelin sheaths that protect and support the nervous system. They're necessary for proper fetal development and motor skills. They're an essential nutrient for the glandular systems that govern reproduction, growth and energy levels. They facilitate the activity of the immune system. And they're indispensable for maintaining a healthy heart and circulatory system.

So, why do they have such a bad reputation? The answer is that most Americans are consuming large quantities of the wrong kinds of fats, and aren't getting the kinds of fats they really need. Here's what's happening:

First of all, fats are composed of fatty acids and glycerine. There are many different types of fatty acids, but there are two that are essential, which means the body can't make them so they have to be derived from the diet. These are the omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.

Omega-6 fatty acids are important because they undergo a series of transformations into substances called eicosanoids, hormone-like chemicals found in every cell of our bodies. The best-known of the eicosanoids are the prostaglandins which play an important role in regulating inflammation and pain. Other eicosanoids reduce clotting, enhance immune function, dilate blood vessels, thereby reducing blood pressure, and inhibit tumor growth. This conversion process grows more difficult as we age, which helps explain why older people tend to have more pain and more inflammatory diseases than younger people.

Omega-3 fatty acids enter the picture because there are "good" eicosanoids (which reduce inflammation, blood pressure, etc.) and "bad" eicosanoids (which increase inflammation, blood pressure, etc.). Omega-3s help inhibit the production of "bad" eicosanoids and increase the production of "good" eicosanoids.

Most Americans are getting enough omega-6 essential fatty acids (EFA), because these are plentiful in the vegetable oils we use, but most people are deficient in omega-3 EFA. Omega-3 EFAs are found primarily in deep ocean fish and wild game. Farm raised fish and animals are lacking in omega-3 EFA in their diets, so their meat is also low in omega 3. Flax seed oil contains

a proper balance of omega-6 and omega-3 EFA and is a good supplement to ensure one is getting the essential fatty acids one needs. However, to balance the high level of omega-6 oils in their diet, many people need an omega-3 supplement.

There are some other essential fatty acid supplements that can be helpful. Omega-6 is converted to GLA (gamma linoleic acid) in the body. As we age, this conversion may become more difficult. The chief factor which is disrupting this process is trans fatty acids. Trans fatty acids are created when oil is heated to high temperatures. The hotter the oil and the more often it is heated, the more trans fatty acids are produced. Hydrogenation of oils also creates trans fatty acids. Hydrogenated oils are found in margarine, shortening and processed vegetable oils.

GLA has been shown to reduce inflammation, lower body fat and cholesterol, and reduce blood clotting and blood pressure. and is found naturally in black currant oil, evening primrose oil and borage oil, all of which can be taken individually as supplements. They can also be taken in combination in the Super GLA blend. These oils are often helpful for restoring prostaglandin production to aid in arthritis, immune disorders, heart disease, high blood pressure and PMS.

CLA (conjugated linoleic acid) is another form of omega-6 which is found in grass fed meat and dairy products. CLA has also been shown to produce more "good" eicosanoids, and may help with inflammation and weight loss.

One can also reduce the production of "bad" eicosanoids by cutting down on the foods that tend to enhance their production, which include the internal organs of animals, most deli meats and fatty red meat.

Monounsaturated fats, found in olives and olive oil, avocados, and nuts like almonds, macadamias and peanuts, are healthy fats to eat. It has also been demonstrated in recent years that unprocessed coconut oil (even though it is a saturated fat) is also a very healthy fat to consume. Processed oils and fried foods, however, are causing problems with our health and should be avoided as much as possible.

Fats are important to health. We just need to consume the right kinds of fats. For assistance, consult your local herb specialist or nutritionist, or some of the sources listed below.

Additional Resources

- "You Didn't Know Fat was Essential?" *Sunshine Sharing*, Vol. 13, No. 5
- "Essential Fatty Acids" *Sunshine Sharing*, Vol. 8, No. 9
- The Wild Rose Scientific Herbal* by Terry Willard, Ph.D.
- The Green Pharmacy** by James A. Duke, Ph.D.

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