

the Surprising Power of fish oil

A top neurosurgeon explains
how omega-3 fatty acids
contribute to better overall
health and wellness.

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Functional foods are those foods that have been found to have a positive effect on health beyond their basic nutritional value. A common example is oatmeal, which has lots of soluble fiber that can help lower cholesterol levels. Probiotics or “good bacteria” found naturally in yogurt and also added to other foods is another example of a functional food known to promote better gut health.

Fish oil or omega-3, found in seafood, fish, and as a dietary supplement, is perhaps the most widely known and researched functional food. Fish oil has tremendous health benefits that have been studied and reported in thousands of scientific articles. The omega-3 found in fish oil is reported to benefit almost every organ in the body including the heart, brain, joints, skin and eyes. I personally use fish oil and recommend it to my patients for joint and spine pain.

The omega-3 molecules are a critical structural component of every cell in our body. They are used as building blocks and are only found in the food we eat or the dietary supplements we take. If you are not consuming enough omega-3 in your diet your body won't function effectively. This is especially important for the brain where over 40% of brain cells are made of omega-3 molecules. It is critical for every human cell to obtain enough omega-3 from your diet.

Facts about Fish Oil and Omega-3 Fatty Acids

- Americans, especially children, have among the lowest dietary intakes of omega-3 or fish oil in the world. In fact, it is estimated that 83% of Americans are deficient in omega-3.

- Studies have shown that lower levels of omega-3 intake are associated with greater incidence of death due to coronary heart disease, a greater incidence of depression, and less healthy new born babies. And in those populations and countries where more fish oil and omega-3 are consumed, fewer of these serious health problems occur.

- The American Heart Association recommends fish as a good source of omega-3 fatty acids. Per the AHA, omega-3 fatty acids benefit the heart of healthy people, and those at high risk of or who have cardiovascular disease.

- Omega-3s have been found to decrease the risk of arrhythmias (abnormal heartbeats), which can lead to sudden death.

- Omega-3 fatty acids also decrease triglyceride levels, slow growth rate of atherosclerotic plaque, and lower blood pressure (slightly).

The importance of a healthy diet and weight was recently discussed at the 2017 Society of General Internal Medicine Annual Meeting. Researchers presented a study on the modifiable risk factors that contribute to decreased life expectancy in the US. They found the risk factors of obesity, diabetes, tobacco use, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol, in this order, contribute to the most years lost life expectancy in the U.S. Of these risk factors, other than tobacco use, all involve what we eat.

This information is very concerning, but it also provides us with hope that by making better food choices and learning more about the benefits of functional foods, we can take back control of our health and live longer healthier lives. After writing two books on fish oil and its benefits and completing numerous studies demonstrating omega-3 benefits for joint pain and improving cholesterol levels, there is little doubt fish oil is the ultimate functional food and one of the best to consider taking for your future health. ✱



MEET DR. MAROON

Joseph Maroon, MD, is a world-renowned neurosurgeon with extensive experience in neurosurgery. He specializes in minimally invasive surgery to speed recovery for his patients. He is a sports medicine expert and innovator in concussion management, personal fitness, and nutrition. As an Ironman triathlete, he lives and breathes his own advice.



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