

OMEGA-3 FATS AND *Cardiovascular Health*

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RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT *by Douglas "Duffy" MacKay, ND*

Omega-3 fats – the most important cardiovascular nutrients

The foundation of preventive medicine for heart disease is exercise and good nutrition. The most important heart-healthy nutrients are the omega-3 fats, EPA and DHA from fish oil. New and important findings are continually being reported about the benefits of fish oil on heart health. These include evidence from randomized, controlled clinical trials about how omega-3 fatty acids improve heart health by reducing triglyceride levels, decreasing the growth of atherosclerotic plaques, improving arterial function, lowering blood pressure, and reducing the risk of thrombosis. Fish oil is also a powerful supporter of the body's natural anti-inflammatory response, which counteracts the progression of heart disease¹.

Evidence from human studies has shown that higher tissue levels of omega-3 fats significantly reduce the risk for heart attack. Red blood cell membrane omega-3 levels of 5% of total fatty acids is associated with a remarkable 70% reduction in the risk of heart attack².

It is well established that fish oil directly improves heart health. As new research emerges, it is becoming increasingly evident that fish oil influences several additional parameters of cardiovascular and metabolic health. In a recent Australian study, when overweight individuals (BMI > 25) combined fish oil (2 g total omega-3) and regular exercise, fish oil supplementation lowered triglycerides, increased HDL cholesterol, and improved endothelium-dependent arterial vasodilatation when compared to placebo. Both fish oil and exercise independently reduced body fat and improved cardiovascular and metabolic health³.

A significant and ever growing body of scientific evidence suggests that individuals with existing risk factors for cardiovascular disease should consume a minimum of 1 gram of EPA + DHA per day. Individuals with elevated serum lipids need 2 to 4 grams of EPA and DHA daily⁴. For many, these recommendations are more than can readily be achieved through diet alone, and a high quality fish oil supplement is recommended.

1. Colussi G, *et al.* Omega-3 fatty acids: from biochemistry to their clinical use in the prevention of cardiovascular disease. *Recent Patents Cardiovasc Drug Discov* 2007;2:13–21.

2. Siscovick DS, *et al.* Dietary intake and cell membrane levels of long-chain n-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids and the risk of primary cardiac arrest. *JAMA* 1995;274:1363–1367.

3. Hill A, *et al.* Combining fish-oil supplements with regular aerobic exercise improves body composition and cardiovascular disease risk factors. *Am J Clin Nutr* 2007;85:1267–1274.

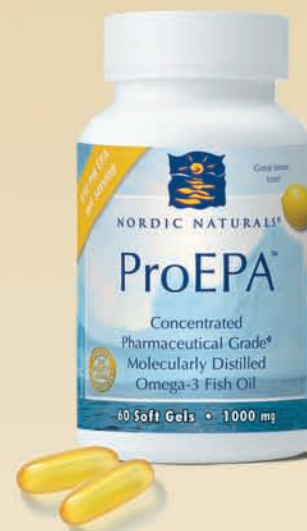
4. Kris-Etherton PM, *et al.* Fish Consumption, Fish Oil, Omega-3 fatty acids and Cardiovascular Disease. *Circulation* 2002;106:2747–2757.

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