**The Brain Benefits of Omega-3 Fats in Your Diet**

By [Deane Alban](https://bebrainfit.com/about-us/#team)

**Omega-3 benefits such as better memory and general brain health are well documented. The key is getting omega-3 fats from the right foods and supplements.**

The discovery of the importance of essential fatty acids (EFAs) has been hailed as one of the most important health advances in modern nutrition.

Omega-3 essential fatty acids in particular are one of the most beneficial groups of nutrients for your brain and overall health.

Omega-3 fats build brain cell membranes, reduce brain inflammation, and promote new brain cell formation.

They can improve your mood and memory and give you protection against brain disorders ranging from depression to dementia.

Omega-3s lower your risk of major chronic diseases including heart disease, cancer, and arthritis. ([1](http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/supplement/omega3-fatty-acids))

But deficiency is widespread — 70% of Americans are believed to be omega-3 deficient. ([2](http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/minutes01_2829_2004.htm))

Omega-3 deficiency is linked to over 50 diseases and contributes to 96,000 preventable deaths per year. ([3](http://www.chiro.org/nutrition/FULL/Life_in_the_Balance.shtml), [4](http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000058))

So we know we need our omega-3 fatty acids, but there’s a lot of confusion about how to get them from both foods and supplements.

Let’s take a deeper look at why omega-3s are so important for health, then discuss how to best include them in your diet.

**Omega-3 to Omega-6 Ratio and Inflammation**

Before we can discuss omega-3 further, we need to introduce you to the other main kind of essential fatty acids — omega-6.

Omega-3 benefits are widely known. Most of these benefits are due to its anti-inflammatory properties.

Omega-6 fats, on the other hand, are pro-inflammatory and contribute to chronic inflammation.

Chronic inflammation is a contributing factor to most major diseases including heart disease, autoimmune diseases, nephritis, cancer, and diabetes. ([5](http://www.lef.org/protocols/health-concerns/chronic-inflammation/Page-01))

Chronic inflammation can play a role in brain fog, ADHD, anxiety, depression, and memory loss.

It can contribute to Alzheimer’s and stroke. ([6](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-breakthrough-depression-solution/201111/the-brain-fire-inflammation-and-depression)) We need some omega-6s in our diet, but most of us consume way too much.

Ideally, we should be eating at most 2-4 times more omega-6 than omega-3 fats.

A diet with a 10-to-1 ratio is considered to be detrimental to health. ([7](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0753332202002536))

Our ancestors ate a ratio of 1-1. ([8](http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/71/1/179S.full?ijkey=5c7af875f3dc71a303f7df78c52145e8b7c31643)) But our modern food diet has this ratio completely lopsided.The average American eats upwards of *25 times* more omega-6 than omega-3 fats. ([9](http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/supplement/omega3-fatty-acids))

The major source of omega-6 fats in our diet is from supposedly healthy vegetable oils like canola, safflower, and soy oils. Some experts believe that it’s your omega-6 to omega-3 ratio that’s most important. Others believe it’s the absolute amounts that matter most.

**Omega-3 Fats and Your Brain**

There are two main omega-3 fatty acids, EPA ([eicosapentaenoic acid](http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/supplement/eicosapentaenoic-acid-epa%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)) and DHA ([docosahexaenoic acid](http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/supplement/docosahexaenoic-acid-dha)). Omega-3 brain benefits are derived mostly from DHA and, to a lesser degree, EPA. DHA is a primary structural component of the brain and specifically of the [cerebral cortex](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~rswenson/NeuroSci/chapter_11.html), the area of the brain responsible for memory, language, abstraction, creativity, judgment, emotion and attention. ([10](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2621042/))

Low DHA levels have been linked to depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, memory loss, and Alzheimer’s. ([11](http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/supplement/omega3-fatty-acids))

Seniors with a higher level of DHA are significantly less likely to develop dementia and Alzheimer’s than people with a low level of DHA. ([12](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2006/11/061113180236.htm)) DHA shields against age-related mental decline, improving both learning and memory in older adults. ([13](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20434961))

People with a low DHA level actually have smaller brains and exhibit more cognitive impairment than those with an adequate level. ([14](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22371413))

**Fish Oil Benefits** The National Institutes of Health lists over 20,000 published studies on it. Proven brain health benefits of fish oil include improvement of: ([32](http://examine.com/supplements/Fish%2BOil/))

* ADHD
* aggression
* anxiety
* bipolar disorder
* cognition in the elderly
* dementia (decreased risk)
* depression
* memory
* mood and general well-being
* processing accuracy
* reaction time
* stress
* stroke (both preventative and therapeutic)

Other proven health benefits of fish oil include decreased inflammation and associated pain of rheumatoid arthritis, normalized triglyceride, cholesterol, and blood pressure levels, increased bone density, and reduced of risk of heart disease, cancer, macular degeneration, and diabetes. ([33](http://examine.com/supplements/Fish%2BOil/), [34](http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/supplement/omega3-fatty-acids))

**Omega-3 Essential Fatty Acids: The Bottom Line**

Omega-3 essential fatty acids are one of the most important nutrients for your brain health, mental well-being, and overall health.

Here’s a quick summary of what you need to know to get the level of omega-3s you need in your diet.

* Plants are not reliable sources of EPA and DHA — the most effective form of EFAs. These are the kind you want in your diet.
* To get omega-3 fats from animal sources, look for labels that say *wild-caught,* *grass-fed, pasture-raised, or free range*.
* The omega-3 benefits of moderate fish consumption outweigh the risks, especially if eating wild-caught cold water fish.
* Most people benefit from a quality omega-3 supplement. The most popular and effective are either fish oil or krill oil.