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Omega-3 Fatty acid supplements: A comprehensive review

Muskan Mujawar*, Sabiya Mulani, Trupti Jagtap, Abhijit Mande, Omkar Gaikwad
Department of Pharmacy, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Technological University, Maharashtra, India

Abstract
The polyunsaturated fats omega-3 fatty acids are essential to human health and have been shown to help with neurological, inflammatory, and cardiovascular disorders. Due to their convenience and alleged health benefits, omega-3 supplements have become more and more popular, especially in tablet form. With an emphasis on the supplements' bioavailability, effectiveness, and clinical results in a range of medical disorders, this review article summarizes the most recent research on omega-3 dietary supplements. Crucial subjects include the many kinds of omega-3 supplements and their relative efficacy, including fish oil, krill oil, and sources derived from algae. The review also discusses factors such as dose, safety profiles, and potential drug interactions. Through a critical analysis of existing literature, this article aims to provide healthcare professionals and consumers with a comprehensive overview of omega-3 supplement, aiding informed decisions regarding their use as dietary supplements.

Keywords: Polyunsaturated, Omega-3, docosahexaenoic, DHA

Introduction

Omega-3 Fatty Acids are major bioactive nutrients for human health. Omega-3 fatty acids, a group of essential polyunsaturated fats primarily found in fatty fishlike salmon, mackerel, and sardines, have garnered considerable attention for their potential health benefits. The two most studied Omega-3 fatty acids are eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), both of which are integral components of cell membranes and play crucial roles in various physiological processes. Beyond their structural role, EPA and DHA are involved in inflammatory pathways, cardiovascular health, brain function, and possibly even mood regulation.

In recent decades, the consumption of Omega-3 supplements has surged worldwide, driven by both consumer interest and scientific inquiry into their therapeutic potential. These supplements, typically derived from fish oil or algae sources, offer a concentrated dose of EPA and DHA that may complement dietary intake. This has sparked numerous studies exploring their efficacy in preventing and managing chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disorders, cognitive decline, and inflammatory conditions.

This review seeks to comprehensively assess the current state of knowledge surrounding Omega-3 supplementation, synthesizing findings from a diverse range of studies including randomized controlled trials, observational research, and meta-analyses. Key aspects to be explored include the effectiveness of Omega-3 supplements in reducing cardiovascular risk factors like triglyceride levels and blood pressure, improving cognitive function and mood disorders, and alleviating symptoms of inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Furthermore, the safety profile of Omega-3 supplements will be critically examined, considering potential adverse effects and interactions with medications. Optimal dosages and formulations will also be addressed, as variability in product composition and purity can influence therapeutic outcomes and consumer confidence.

The benefits of dietary omega-3 fatty acid supplementation have been demonstrated in numerous subsequent studies in relation to the following conditions: metabolic syndrome, obesity, vascular reactivity, dyslipidaemia, atherosclerosis, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, inflammatory diseases, neurological/psychiatric disorders, renal disease, osteoporosis, eye diseases, and pregnancy. Clinicians are becoming more interested in the significance of omega-3 fatty acid supplements in human health as the world places more emphasis on the prevention of chronic diseases.

Chemical composition

Omega-3 supplements typically contain concentrated forms of two essential fatty acids: eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). These are polyunsaturated fats that are crucial for human health, primarily obtained from marine sources such as fish oil or algae. Here's a detailed breakdown of their chemical

Composition

- **Eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA)**

Chemical Structure: EPA is a 20-carbon fatty acid with five double bonds, making it an omega-3 fatty acid.
Chemical Formula: C20H30O2
Double Bond Position: The first double bond is located at the third carbon atom from the omega end (omega-3 position).
Sources: EPA is predominantly found in cold-water fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, and herring.

- **Docosahexaenoic Acid (DHA)**

Chemical Structure: DHA is a 22-carbon fatty acid with six double bonds.
Chemical Formula: C22H32O2
Double Bond Position: The first double bond is located at the third carbon atom from the omega end (omega-3 position).

Sources: DHA is also found in abundance in fatty fish and is particularly prevalent in fish oil supplements derived from species like tuna and krill.

Other Components

Triglycerides: Omega-3 supplements often contain these fats in triglyceride form, where three fatty acids (such as EPA and DHA) are esterified to a glycerol molecule.

Ethyl Esters: Some supplements may contain EPA and DHA in ethyl ester form, which is a synthetic form created through a process of esterification.

- **Additives**

Supplements may include antioxidants like vitamin E to prevent oxidation of the fatty acids, ensuring product stability and shelf life.

Dietary Sources of Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids

1. **A-Linolenic acid:** Walnuts, flaxseed oil, canola oil
2. **Eicosapentaenoic acid:** Fatty fish, fish oils
3. **Docosahexaenoic acid:** Fatty fish, fish oils

Pharmacological activities

1. **Anti-inflammatory Properties**

- Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly EPA and DHA, exert potent anti-inflammatory effects through several mechanisms:
- Inhibition of Pro-inflammatory Pathways: EPA and DHA compete with arachidonic acid (an omega-6 fatty acid) for incorporation into cell membranes. This reduces the production of pro-inflammatory eicosanoids derived from arachidonic acid, such as prostaglandin E2 and leukotriene B4.
- Reduction of Inflammatory Cytokines: EPA and DHA inhibit the production of inflammatory cytokines (e.g., TNF-alpha, IL-1 beta, IL-6) by immune cells such as macrophages and monocytes. This modulation helps dampen chronic inflammation seen in conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and inflammatory bowel disease.
- Modulation of NF-kB Activation: Omega-3 fatty acids interfere with the activation of nuclear factor kappa B (NF-kB), a key transcription factor that regulates the expression of genes involved in inflammation. By inhibiting NF-kB, omega-3s reduce the production of inflammatory proteins and enzymes.

2. **Cardiovascular Benefits**

- Omega-3 fatty acids are renowned for their cardiovascular protective effects:
- Triglyceride Reduction: EPA and DHA lower blood triglyceride levels by reducing their synthesis in the liver and increasing their clearance from circulation. High triglyceride levels are a risk factor for cardiovascular disease.
- Anti-arrhythmic Effects: Omega-3s stabilize cardiac cell membranes and reduce susceptibility to arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms), particularly in individuals with a history of coronary artery disease.
- Blood Pressure Regulation: While the effect is modest, omega-3 fatty acids may slightly reduce blood pressure, contributing to overall cardiovascular health.
- Endothelial Function Improvement: EPA and DHA enhance endothelial function by promoting the release of nitric oxide, a vasodilator that helps maintain healthy blood vessel function.

3. **Neuroprotective Effects**

- DHA, in particular, plays a crucial role in brain health and neuroprotection:
- Membrane Fluidity and Function: DHA is a major component of neuronal membranes, where it enhances membrane fluidity and facilitates neurotransmission, synaptic plasticity, and signal transduction.
- Anti-inflammatory Effects in the Brain: Omega-3 fatty acids reduce neuroinflammation by inhibiting microglial activation and decreasing the production of inflammatory cytokines within the brain.
- Neurogenesis and Cognitive Function: Adequate levels of DHA support neurogenesis (the formation of new neurons) and are associated with improved cognitive function, memory, and learning abilities.

4. **Mood and Mental Health**

- Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly EPA, have significant implications for mental health:
- Serotonin and Dopamine Regulation: EPA influences neurotransmitter levels in the brain, including serotonin and dopamine, which are critical for regulating mood, motivation, and emotional stability.
- Anti-depressant Effects: Omega-3 supplements have shown efficacy as adjunctive therapy in treating major depressive disorder and reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Brain-derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF): EPA and DHA increase BDNF levels, a protein crucial for neuronal survival, synaptic plasticity, and mood regulation.

5. **Joint Health and Rheumatoid Arthritis**

- Omega-3 fatty acids offer benefits in inflammatory joint conditions:
- Reduction of Joint Pain and Stiffness: EPA and DHA have mild analgesic properties and suppress joint inflammation by decreasing the production of inflammatory mediators (e.g., prostaglandins, leukotrienes).
- Improvement in Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms: Omega-3 supplementation is associated with reduced disease activity and improved clinical outcomes in individuals with rheumatoid arthritis, potentially reducing the need for anti-inflammatory medications.

6. **Skin Health**

- Omega-3 fatty acids contribute to skin barrier function and overall skin health:
- Moisture Retention and Elasticity: EPA and DHA support the skin's lipid barrier, helping to retain moisture and improve skin elasticity.
- Anti-inflammatory Effects in Dermatological Conditions: Omega-3s may alleviate symptoms of inflammatory skin disorders such as psoriasis and eczema by reducing skin inflammation and promoting healing.

7. **Cancer Prevention**

- Emerging evidence suggests omega-3 fatty acids may play a role in cancer prevention:
- Anti-carcinogenic Effects: EPA and DHA have been shown to inhibit cancer cell proliferation, induce

apoptosis (programmed cell death), and interfere with tumour angiogenesis (formation of new blood vessels to support tumour growth).
- Reduced Risk of Certain Cancers: Epidemiological studies have linked higher omega-3 intake with a lower incidence of breast, prostate, and colorectal cancers, though more research is needed to establish definitive preventive effects.

8. Eye Health

To maintain ideal retinal function and visual acuity, DHA is essential.

DHA is highly concentrated in the retina and is essential for preserving the integrity of the retinal cell membrane and photoreceptor function.

Protection Against Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD): By guarding against oxidative stress and inflammation in the retina, omega-3 fatty acids may lower the risk of AMD, a major cause of vision loss in the elderly.

Adverse effect

Omega-3 supplements are generally well-tolerated by most people, but like any supplement, they can have adverse effects in some individuals. Here are some potential adverse effects of omega-3 supplements:

1. **Digestive Problems:** Gastrointestinal symptoms like indigestion, nausea, and diarrhoea can affect certain people.

2. **Allergic Reactions:** Omega-3 supplements made from fish or shellfish may cause allergic reactions in people who are allergic to these foods.

3. **Blood Thinning:** There may be a slight blood-thinning impact of omega-3 fatty acids. While this may be advantageous for cardiovascular health, certain people may be more vulnerable to bleeding, particularly if they already use blood thinners or have a bleeding disease.

4. **Suppression of immunological Response:** Although this impact is not well-established and may differ across individuals, omega-3 supplements may occasionally reduce immunological function.

5. **Increased Oxidation:** Omega-3 fatty acids are prone to oxidation, which can reduce their effectiveness and potentially lead to the formation of harmful compounds. Quality and freshness of the supplement are crucial to minimize this risk.

6. **Interactions with Medications:** Omega-3 supplements can interact with certain medications, such as blood thinners, and may need to be used cautiously or avoided in these cases.

Safe and effective doses of omega-3 fatty acid supplements for adults

DHA and EPA

- An adult's daily need for EPA and DHA should be at least 220 mg of each.
  In order to treat neurological and behavioural illnesses, it is generally advised to consume two to three servings of omega-3 fatty acids per week, or approximately 1250 mg of EPA and DHA per day

Fish oil supplements

- 3000–4000 mg of standardized fish oils daily, or around two to three portions of fatty fish each week.
- A 1000 mg fish oil capsule normally contains 180 mg of EPA and 120 mg of DHA.

ALA

- An adult's daily required intake of ALA should be approximately 220 mg.
- Flaxseed oil
- For general health, one or two tablespoons of flaxseed oil should be consumed daily.
- Doses as high as 3000 mg are advised daily to prevent neurodegenerative illnesses; doses as high as 6000 mg daily may be advised to treat these ailments.
- Doses over 3000 mg daily may cause individuals with diabetes and impaired glucose tolerance to have worsening glycemia, and patients with hypertriglyceridemia may see an increase in LDL-C.

Table 1: Some effective combination of drug with omega 3 fatty acid

Drugs	Beneficial for
NSAIDs	Reduction in dosage needed for analgesia
Cyclosporine	Reduction in hypertensive and nephrotoxic effects
Blockers of TNF	inhibition of TNF and IL-1 synthesis
Methotrexate	Reduction in gastrointestinal toxicity
HMG-CoA reductase inhibitors	enhancement of pharmacologic effects

Future prospect:

1. Health advantages: Omega-3 fatty acids, especially docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid), are well-known for their cardiovascular advantages, which include lowering the risk of heart disease and lowering triglyceride levels. They are also essential for maintaining the health of the eyes, brain, and controlling inflammation.

2. Diverse Applications: According to continuing study, omega-3s may be beneficial for ailments like melancholy, arthritis, and cognitive decline in addition to heart and brain health. As additional research validates these advantages, their potential uses in therapeutic and preventive healthcare may grow.

3. Formulation Innovation: The stability and bioavailability of omega-3 supplements are being enhanced by technological advancements. This covers advancements in encapsulation, packaging, and even substitute sources (vegetarians and vegans can use omega-3s obtained from algae).

4. Consumer Awareness and Demand: As consumers' health consciousness grows, so does their knowledge of the advantages of omega-3 fatty acids, thanks to media and medical professionals. This tendency is probably going to continue, particularly as the world's population ages.

5. Quality and Regulatory Standards: Tight regulations guarantee the safety and quality of omega-3 supplements, which builds consumer confidence. These standards ensure efficacy and promote market growth as they develop and

improve.

6. Personalized Nutrition: As genetic testing and personalized medicine progress, future recommendations for omega-3 intake may be customized based on unique health profiles, increasing their efficacy.

7. Environmental Sustainability: Using wild-caught fish or growing algae are examples of sustainable sourcing techniques that are becoming more and more significant. Consumers that care about the environment are likely to favor brands that are dedicated to sustainability.

Conclusion

Omega-3 supplements offer a number of possible health advantages and are a practical and efficient way to increase dietary intake of vital fatty acids. Omega-3 supplements have proven to be versatile in enhancing overall health outcomes, ranging from cardiovascular protection and cognitive support to anti-inflammatory effects and mood modulation. However, factors including dosage, composition, and individual response can affect how effective Omega-3 capsules are. Future studies should concentrate on clarifying the ideal dosage schedules, finding indicators of Omega-3 status, and investigating customized methods of Omega-3 supplementation. Healthcare providers can more effectively include Omega-3 supplements into treatment plans for chronic illnesses and preventive health initiatives by taking advantage of developments in clinical research and nutritional science. Ultimately, optimizing the possible advantages of Omega-3 pills while reducing the potential hazards requires making educated decisions and adhering to evidence-based recommendations.

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