



Flaxseed Oil

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Flaxseed oil contains both omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, which are needed for health. Flaxseed oil contains the essential fatty acid alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), which the body converts into eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oil. Some researchers think that flaxseed oil might have some of the same benefits as fish oil. Omega-3 fatty acids, usually from fish oil, have been shown to reduce inflammation and help prevent certain chronic diseases such as heart disease and arthritis.



Getting a good balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids in the diet is important. These essential fats are both examples of polyunsaturated fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids help reduce inflammation, while most omega-6 fatty acids tend to contribute to inflammation. A healthy diet should consist of roughly 2 - 4 times fewer omega-6 fatty acids than omega-3 fatty acids. The typical American diet, however, tends to contain 14 - 25 times more omega-6 fatty acids than omega-3 fatty acids. Many researchers believe this is a significant factor in the rising rate of inflammatory disorders in the United States. Flaxseed -- but not flaxseed oil -- also contains a group of chemicals called lignans that may play a role in the prevention of cancer.



Lignans are a type of fiber, and at the same time a type of phytoestrogen—a chemical similar to the human hormone estrogen. When you eat lignans, bacteria in the digestive tract convert them into estrogen-like substances called enterodiols and enterolactone, which are thought to have anti-tumor effects. Lignans and other flaxseed components may also have antioxidant properties—that is, they may reduce the activity of cell-damaging free radicals. Flaxseed oil lacks lignans, but some processors add

them to their oil.

Nearly every system in the body can benefit from flax seed oil's natural properties, including

the cardiovascular system, immune system, circulatory system, reproductive system, nervous system, as well as joints and skin. Flaxseed oil may help reduce cholesterol and triglyceride levels in some people with diabetes. However, some people with type 2 diabetes cannot properly metabolize ALA, so flaxseed oil may be of no benefit to them.

- Studies show that Omega-3 fatty acids help lower cholesterol and blood triglycerides, and prevent clots in arteries, which may result in strokes, heart attacks and thromboses.
- Helps protect the body against high blood pressure, inflammation, water retention, sticky platelets and lowered immune function.
- Shortens recovery time for fatigued muscles after exertion.
- Increases the body's production of energy and also increases stamina.
- Accelerates the healing of sprains and bruises.
- Stimulates brown fat cells and increases the metabolic rate making it easier to burn off fat.
- Autoimmune disorders. These disorders, such as rheumatoid arthritis and ulcerative colitis, cause immune cells to attack healthy tissue in the body. Flaxseed oil is converted to a substance in the body that can inhibit this autoimmune reaction.

Flaxseed oil and cancer:

Because of the estrogen-like activity of lignans, scientists aren't sure whether flaxseed would be harmful or helpful for breast cancer. Several laboratory studies support the use of flaxseed oil in preventing cancer development.

Colon cancer:

Laboratory studies show that lignans may slow the growth of colon tumor cells and some studies have found that flaxseed may significantly reduce the number of abnormal cell growths (early markers of colon cancer). More research is needed.

Prostate cancer:

Researchers are investigating whether lignans in flaxseed help prevent prostate cancer. In one study that compared 25 men with prostate cancer to the same number of men without the disease, researchers found that men who consumed a low-fat, flaxseed-supplemented diet for 1 month had slower tumor progression than those who did not consume the diet. However, a study of about 47,000 men found that ALA omega-3 fatty acids may stimulate the growth of prostate tumors in men with advanced prostate cancer. The researchers found that men who were suffering from advanced prostate cancer had higher quantities of ALA from non-animal as well as meat and dairy sources.

Skin cancer:

Animal studies suggest that lignans from flaxseed may also offer some protection against skin cancer including, possibly, the prevention of metastatic spread of melanoma from the skin to the lungs.

Although further research is needed, preliminary evidence suggests that omega-3 fatty acids may help protect against certain infections and treating a variety of conditions, including ulcers, migraine headaches, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, addiction, eating disorders, preterm labor, emphysema, psoriasis, glaucoma, Lyme disease, lupus, and panic attacks.

Which is better: Flaxseed Oil or Fish Oil?

Research indicates that for those who do not eat fish or wish to take fish oil supplements, flaxseed oil does provide a good alternative.

Other factors are worth considering:

If you are a vegetarian, ground flax seeds or flaxseed oil will likely be your preferred choice.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classifies omega-3 fatty acids from fish as GRAS (Generally Regarded as Safe). However, fish oil can cause stomach upset and/or diarrhea in some individuals, especially in high doses. Other possible side effects include increased burping, acid reflux, heartburn and abdominal bloating or pain.

A fishy aftertaste is common with some fish oil supplements. Refrigerating the capsules or liquid can reduce this or purchase brands that promise no such problems. Concerns about mercury poisoning from fish oils generally are unfounded. When present in waterways, methylmercury accumulates in fish meat more than in fish oil and testing of fish oil supplements show they generally contain little or no mercury. Still, if this is a concern, using flaxseed oil as an alternative eliminates this issue.

If you are currently being treated with blood-thinning medications (anticoagulants), you should not use flaxseed oil (alpha-linolenic acid or ALA) or other omega-3 fatty acids without first talking to your health care provider.

Possible Interactions:

Flaxseed oil may increase your need for vitamin E.



Be sure to try NSP's Flax Seed Oil w/Lignans (60 softgel caps) or Flax Seed Oil Liquid (8 fl. oz.).

References:

- <http://www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/flaxseed-oil-000304.htm>
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