**Bridge to Wellness Group**
ADVANCED NATUROPATHIC CARE

# NEWSLETTER

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# Essential Fatty Acids

**What are Essential Fatty Acids (EFA's)?**
These are unsaturated fats and oils that are essential to the body, but are not made by the body. Since they are essential to maintain health, we must get these from our diet. Two types of EFA's are Omega 3's and Omega 6's. What is the difference between these two?

**Omega 3 fatty acids** are long chain fatty acids and are found to be abundant in certain cold water fish, such as mackerel, salmon, tuna, sardines, krill (crustaceans). There are also some plant-based sources of Omega 3's, such as flax meal (ground flax seeds), English walnuts, chia seeds, algae and others. Omega 3's can also be found in small amounts in eggs from pasture raised chickens and grass fed beef, but these sources provide much less than the fish and other sources mentioned.

There are two important omega 3 fatty acids that are found in cold water fish and algae. These are Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). These two types of omega 3's are vital to long term health. **DHA** is beneficial for proper brain development, for vision and for neurological protection. **EPA** is very beneficial to help moderate the body's natural inflammatory responses. It also improves cardiovascular integrity. This benefit is one of the reasons many cardiologists will recommend fish oil to their patients with cardiovascular disease, especially when cholesterol ratios are out of balance.

The Omega 3's found in plants, nuts and seeds provide alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). ALA *can* be converted to DHA and EPA through a chain of chemical reactions in the liver (good-working liver is required), but only a small percentage of ALA makes it all the way to DHA/EPA. This is due primarily to the competition of omega 6 fatty acids, which people tend to eat in much higher quantities.

**Omega 6 fatty acids** are also essential fats, and are found in vegetable oils, olive oil, nuts, beef and poultry. It's important to note that olive oil contains both omega 3 and omega 6. However, it contains approximately 10 times more omega 6 (in the form of linoleic acid). It is important that we consume equal parts of Omega 3's and Omega 6's. However, the average person in this country consumes 25 times more Omega 6's than Omega 3's. This may be even higher for those who do not like seafood and do not supplement with fish oil. This imbalance puts a burden on the heart and circulatory system.

Many people include coconut oil in their diet thinking they are getting Omega 3's. While coconut oil does contain beneficial medium chain fatty acids (caprylic acid, lauric acid, capril acid), they are not omega 3's. The good news is coconut oil is known to be anti-inflammatory and beneficial to the cardiovascular system, brain and nervous system.

When it comes to essential fatty acids and other beneficial fats, balance is key. If you are like me and do not enjoy eating seafood or coconut oil, then in order to create and maintain fatty acid balance, supplementing can be not only beneficial, but necessary. ♦