The Significant Impact Omega 3 Fatty Acids Have on Your Health

By Frenesa Hall, MD

I think by now, most of us have heard about Omega 3's and many foods are enhanced with them from eggs to waffles. However, most of us have no idea why we need these important nutrients. I'm also sure that most of us didn't know that there are easy ways to test our own levels.

There are 3 crucial Omega 3 fatty acids – ALA which is converted into EPA and DHA. (These are abbreviations for long chemical names.) EPA and DHA are more readily useful to the human body. "Symptoms of omega-3 fatty acid deficiency include extreme tiredness (fatigue), poor memory, dry skin, heart problems, mood swings or depression, and poor circulation"[1] to name a few.

Omega 3's have been shown to be useful in the following ways:

- Critical for fetal brain and nervous system development as well as cognitive and behavioral function (such as depression)
- Lower risk for heart disease
- Improve lipid levels in the blood
- Decrease risk for and improve Alzheimer's
- Decrease risk for developing Macular Degeneration (leading cause of blindness in the US)
- Slow the progression of Macular Degeneration
- Reduce inflammation in the body

Improve cell membrane function (every cell has an outer wall called the membrane which is critical in regulating the transport of nutrients into the cell and waste out of the cell. We have 100 trillion cells in our bodies!). This means Omega 3's can improve fertility and cell communication among other functions.

Most Americans don't eat enough of the foods that are rich in Omega 3's with any regularity. Those foods include:

- Certain fish - salmon, tuna, halibut, lake trout,
- Flax seed
- Walnuts
- Shrimp
- Tofu

These important nutrients can be tested easily with the Blood Spot Fatty Acid Analysis by Metametrix Clinical Laboratory (www.metametrix.com). It will give you some basic and useful information about your fatty acid status including your EPA level, DHA level, trans fat level (very bad fat found in processed food) and the AA to EPA ratio. The AA/EPA ratio is particularly important as it is a way to assess how well your body is balancing pro-inflammatory fatty acids with anti-inflammatory fatty acids, and inflammation plays a role in many chronic disorder including arthritis and heart disease. The ideal result ranges between 1.5 – 3.0 according to Barry Sears, PhD who is a leading authority in this field.

He also recommends supplementing with a minimum of 2.5 grams (or 2500 mg) of pharmaceutical grade fish oil containing EPA and DHA. Pharmaceutical grade products provide more of the important oils, have removed the toxins (like mercury or PCB's) that accumulate in fish and remove the contaminants that cause gas, bloating and other GI side effects. He suggests in his book, The Omega Rx Zone, a way to test if your fish oil is pharmaceutical grade. Simply put the oil in a cup (cut open the gel caps and squeeze out the contents) and freeze for 5 hours. If it remains liquid, you probably have a pharmaceutical grade product. An easier way is to go to my website, www.MDWellnessSolutions.com and you can purchase Omega Max which is guaranteed to be a pharmaceutical grade product and is the product I take daily (2-4 gel caps each day).

If you are interested in testing your Blood Spot Fatty Acid levels, contact me and I'll arrange for you to get a kit.

[1] Omega 3 Fatty Acids, University of Maryland Medical Center website - http://www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/omega-3-000316.htm