



Flax is Heart Healthy

February is Heart Health Month. Why not celebrate by doing something good for your heart? Eat flax!

Why Eat Flax?

Flax contains an abundance of healthy fats. Flax has very little saturated fat (9%) and a generous amount of mono and polyunsaturated fats (18% and 73%). Flax is loaded with omega 3 fatty acids (ALA). For example, 2 Tbsp of milled flax seed provides about 3.3 g (3300 mg) of Omega-3 fat (ALA).

One study reported that eating 3-6 Tbsp of milled flax daily for four weeks, significantly reduced LDL (bad) cholesterol levels.

In another study, flax lowered blood pressure in healthy menopausal women who ate 5 Tbsp of milled flax daily for one year. To have an effect on blood pressure flax interventions should last at least three months.

It is recommended to aim for 2200 mg to 3000 mg of ALA each day. An amount easily achieved by including 2 Tbsp of milled flax in your daily diet.

To reduce the risk of heart disease it is recommended to eat 500 mg to 1000 mg EPA + DHA each day.

A 3 oz portion of cooked salmon provides 1500 mg of omega-3 fats as DHA/EPA.

It's not only the amount of fat you eat that matters, but the type of fat you eat. Some types of fat are actually good for you! Soft and liquid fats are generally made up of healthy fats, such as polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Hard fats tend to contain more saturated and trans fats, which are not as healthy for our heart.

Keep reading to learn more about the different types of dietary fat.

Polyunsaturated Fat

Polyunsaturated fat is considered a healthy fat. An easy way to remember that it is a healthy fat is by its name - **unsaturated**. This type of fat is well known for its ability to improve cholesterol in the body. Try to include more polyunsaturated fats in your diet by eating more safflower, canola and corn oils, nuts (walnuts and pinenuts) and seeds (sesame and sunflower). Flax oil, a natural component of whole milled flax is made up of approximately 73% polyunsaturated fat.

Omega-3 Fat

(Alpha-Linolenic Acid – ALA)
Omega-3 fat is a polyunsaturated fat. Omega-3 fats are well known for their health benefits in reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke and cancer. There are three types of omega-3 fatty acids; alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). Studies indicate that North Americans do not eat enough Omega-3 fats. Food sources of Omega -3 fats include fatty fish such as salmon, trout, anchovies, mackerel, sardines, and plant foods such as flax seeds, walnuts and soybeans. Many

foods are now enhanced with omega-3 fats including eggs, milk, margarine etc. Flax oil is made up of approximately 57% omega-3 ALA fat.

“Food sources of Omega -3 fats include fatty fish such as salmon, trout, anchovies, mackerel, sardines, and plant foods such as flax seeds, walnuts and soybeans.”

Omega-3 fats:

- Protects against irregular heartbeats
- Decrease the risk of sudden cardiac death
- Reduce blood pressure
- Reduce stickiness of blood platelets, making the blood less likely to clot
- Stabilize existing plaques in arteries
- Reduce inflammation
- Lower blood LDL cholesterol

Monounsaturated Fat

Monounsaturated fat is considered a healthy fat. An easy way to remember that it is a healthy fat is its name – **unsaturated**. It is known to help lower cholesterol in the body. You will find mono unsaturated fat in olive and canola oil, avocado and some nuts. Flax oil is made up of approximately 18% monounsaturated fat.

Saturated Fat

Saturated fat is known to increase the cholesterol in our blood. It is usually solid at room temperature and gets harder when chilled. It is mainly found in animal products such as meat, chicken, cream, butter, cheese and spreads. Try to think about the origin of the food. Usually you can determine if it would likely contain saturated fat. These fats are not

the best choice for our health, and we should try to eat less of them.

Trans Fat

Trans fat is a byproduct of the hydrogenation process. Not all hydrogenated fat is trans fat, but all hydrogenated fat is saturated.

Trans fats are produced when an oil is turned into a solid at room temperature. This process, is called hydrogenation, because hydrogen is added to the oil. This produces a fat which is easier to spread. Hydrogenated fat also helps maintain the shelf-life of food and is often used in baked goods such as pie crusts, cakes, and cookies, as well as fried snacks. The USFDA has advised that there is no safe limit for trans fat. They should be avoided.

Feeling confused about what to do regarding omega-3 fats?

Keep it simple. Eat 2 Tbsp flax flour everyday (this will provide 3000 mg of ALA) and aim for a serving of fatty fish 2-3 times a week (this will provide 1500 mg DHA/EPA).

To learn more about heart disease and how to keep your heart healthy visit:

www.heartandstroke.ca

You can also visit www.valleyflaxflour.com for more information about flax.

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References available upon request