

Tip Sheet

Top 10 Takeaways From the Research and Recommendations

1. The AI for alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) in healthy individuals is 1.1 g per day for women and 1.6 g per day for men or 0.6%–1.2% of energy intake in one day. Recommendations for EPA and DHA range from 250–500 mg per day.
2. Recommendations often can be met via diet by consuming two 6-oz seafood meals per week and a variety of nuts, seeds, nut oils, and leafy greens.
3. ALA must be converted in the body to EPA and DHA before it can be used in other bodily processes.
4. Meeting omega-3 PUFA requirements during pregnancy is important for the development of the fetal brain due to DHA's role in brain growth and function.
5. Prescribed fish oil supplementation for secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease and treatment of hypertriglyceridemia has the strongest scientific support of the conditions discussed.
6. The support for EPA and DHA for reduced muscle soreness and improved performance after exercise is growing and may be of benefit to athletic clients.
7. Marine algae supplements are a viable option for vegetarian or vegan individuals who don't consume animal products.
8. Fish oil supplements generally are safe, but amounts of more than 3 g per day can cause excessive bleeding.
9. There are few conclusive results on fish oil supplements, making it difficult to provide firm recommendations for the prevention or treatment of disease.
10. When it's appropriate to recommend dietary supplements, be sure to suggest options that are tested by a third-party certification company.

Plant Sources of ALA

Pumpkin seeds
Olive oil
Walnuts

Walnut oil
Flaxseeds
Flaxseed oil
Soyfoods
Chia seeds
Leafy greens

Marine Sources of EPA and DHA

Salmon
Chunk light tuna
Pollock
Shrimp
Clams
Mussels
Sardines
Seaweed
Oysters

When Is It Appropriate to Supplement?

Once dietitians have met with clients and obtained a thorough background and understanding of their dietary intakes of omega-3 PUFAs, they'll be able to determine whether it's appropriate to recommend a fish oil or marine algae supplement. If RDs have reason to believe that individuals are falling short of 1.1–1.6 g per day of ALA and/or 250–500 mg of DHA and EPA, and they're unable to meet this intake through the food sources listed above, supplementation likely is appropriate.