What about Flaxseed?

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Fish such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna and salmon contain two omega-3 fatty acids – eicosapentaenoic and docosahexaenoic acids (EPA and DHA). A third kind, alpha-linolenic acid, is less potent. It comes from soybeans, canola, walnut and flaxseed, and oils made from those beans, nuts and seeds.

Flaxseed oil and flaxseeds (which need to be ground into flaxseed meal to be properly utilized by your body) each provide omega-3 fatty acids. Research shows that the omega-3 fatty acids, especially those in fish, have cardioprotective benefits, but that all omega-3 fatty acids, including alpha-linolenic acid, the one in flaxseed, are needed for good health.

Flaxseeds are also a great source of soluble fiber as well as providing thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, trace minerals and even some high quality protein. You must consume them because your body cannot manufacture them.

To add this supplement to your diet, you can either use the flaxseeds whole or use the flaxseed oil. Practically, it is easier to use the oil and not have to bother with grinding the seeds. Remember, the oil must be refrigerated so that it does turn rancid.

Nutritionally, flaxseeds will give you more bang for the buck. They have a pleasant, nut-like flavor and taste good sprinkled on a variety of foods. You must either chew the seeds very well or grind them, because whole seeds pass through the body without their essential nutrients being absorbed. You can purchase ground seeds, but they are much more perishable than the whole seeds. Either way, they need to be kept in the refrigerator, too. The seeds can also be bought in bulk and kept in the freezer for even longer storage.

The recommendation for adults is to use one or two tablespoons of flaxseed meal or oil daily. You can stir it into hot cereal or into your juice. It can also be used as a replacement for an egg in some recipes such as muffins or pancakes. To replace one egg, use one tablespoon flaxseed meal plus three tablespoons water (or other liquid). You can also mix one to three teaspoons of flaxseed oil with a little ketchup as a condiment. Be careful not to exceed recommended amounts as flax can have a laxative effect.

The bottom line is that flax, in either form, promotes heart and colon health, healthy skin, and helps to stabilize blood sugar. However, as any dietary supplement can have the potential for side effects and interactions with medications (both prescribed and over the counter), please check with your health care provider before adding this or any supplement to your diet. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that consumers not exceed more than a total of three grams per day of omega-3 fatty acids, with no more than two grams per day from a dietary supplement.

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The US Department of Agriculture recently released MyPyramid, an updated guide to healthful eating and active lifestyles. You can find it online at www.mypyramid.gov. Enter information about yourself into "My Pyramid Plan" and get a customized food guide that tells how much from each food group you need every day.

EXCERPTS FROM

Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005

from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA)

FOOD GROUPS TO ENCOURAGE

- ◆ Consume a sufficient amount of fruits and vegetables while staying within energy needs. Two cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables per day are recommended for a reference 2,000-calorie intake, with higher or lower amounts depending on the calorie level.
- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables each day. In particular, select from all five vegetable subgroups (dark green, orange, legumes, starchy vegetables and other vegetables) several times a week.
- Consume three or more ounce-equivalents of whole-grain products per day, with the rest of the recommended grains coming from enriched or whole-grain products. In general, at least half the grains should come from whole grains.
- ♦ Consume three cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk products.

FATS

- Consume less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fatty acids and less than 300 mg/day of cholesterol, and keep *trans* fatty acid consumption as low as possible.
- Keep total fat intake between 20 to 35 percent of calories, with most fats coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts and vegetable oils.
- When selecting and preparing meat, poultry, dry beans and milk or milk products, make choices that are lean, low-fat or fat-free.
- ◆ Limit intake of fats and oils high in saturated and/or trans fatty acids, and choose products low in such fats and oils.

CARBOHYDRATES

- ◆ Choose fiber-rich fruits, vegetables and whole grains often.
- ◆ Choose and prepare foods and beverages with little added sugars or caloric sweeteners, such as amounts suggested by the USDA Food Guide and the DASH Eating Plan.
- Reduce the incidence of dental caries by practicing good oral hygiene and consuming sugar- and starch-containing foods and beverages less frequently.

SODIUM AND POTASSIUM

- Consume less than 2,300 mg (approximately one teaspoon of salt) of sodium per day.
- Choose and prepare foods with little salt. At the same time, consume potassium-rich foods, such as fruits and vegetables.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

- Those who choose to drink alcoholic beverages should do so sensibly and in moderation

 defined as the consumption of up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks
 per day for men.
- Alcoholic beverages should not be consumed by some individuals, including those who cannot restrict their alcohol intake, women of childbearing age who may become pregnant, pregnant and lactating women, children and adolescents, individuals taking medications that can interact with alcohol, and those with specific medical conditions.
- ◆ Alcoholic beverages should be avoided by individuals engaging in activities that require attention, skill or coordination, such as driving or operating machinery.

A consumer brochure, "Finding Your Way to a Healthier You: Based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans," can be downloaded from www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/html/brochure.htm.