

BUSTING MYTHS ABOUT FATS AND OILS

THE FATS AND OILS NUTRITION explanation is the most complex in nutrition and therefore the most misunderstood. However, without fats and oils we wouldn't survive, because they are critical for our survival, despite the bad press they received for many decades due to incomplete information and misinformation.

Fats and oils provide insulation and cushioning around organs and bones to protect them from outside damage – like shock absorption; when used they provide warmth to our bodies in cold climates; they regulate our body temperature; they absorb and store fat soluble vitamins, like vitamin A and E; they allow cell membranes to work efficiently; they keep our skin soft and lubricated and allow vitamin D to be synthesised via the cholesterol in our skin, and they are involved in gene expression.



There are three categories of fats and oils and all the fat containing foods we eat contain a combination of the types of fats and oils that fit into these three categories. They are: saturated fats, mono-unsaturated fats, and polyunsaturated fats, and these names refer to their molecular makeup, their biochemistry.

The body can make both saturated fats and mono-unsaturated fats, but cannot make the third type, polyunsaturated fats. Because the body cannot make them, they are called essential fatty acids, or EFAs. The word 'essential' means they must be supplied by our diet – we can't make them.

These EFAs ensure that cell membranes remain supple and flexible by providing them with a very high degree of elasticity and fluidity. Particularly in the brain, these qualities

are of utmost importance. In addition, they ensure that inflammation is kept at a minimum, which is very important for optimal health.

These EFAs come in two varieties, omega 3 or omega 6. Most people know omega 3 fats as fish oils and believe that those are the only ones we need. The popular media message has also been to avoid all omega 6 oils.

This is not the whole story. Some omega 6's are anti-inflammatory and some are inflammatory. Most omega 6 fats available in the supermarket are damaged and toxic to human health. The brain needs both omega 3 and omega 6 essential fats, but in an undamaged form and in the right ratio.

Sixty percent of the brain is made up of fat – yes, 60%! That means that if you have been avoiding fat, you suffer from low mood, possibly depression and as you get older your ability to learn new things and remember the ones you have already learned, goes down drastically.

Twenty five percent of that sixty percent should be made up of EFAs, in which many people are deficient. Researchers now know that a lack of these specific types of fat is very likely to predispose us to mood challenges, and memory decline, which is a precursor to dementia.

Focus on nuts and seeds generally, for both Omega 3 and 6 fats and oils, as well as dark green leafy vegetables, which contain omega 3. Chia, flax, and hemp seeds contain omega 3, and should form an integral part of your daily diet.



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