



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Omega-3

This information describes the common uses of Omega-3, how it works, and its possible side effects.

Tell your healthcare providers about any dietary supplements you're taking, such as herbs, vitamins, minerals, and natural or home remedies. This will help them manage your care and keep you safe.

What is it?

Omega-3, also called omega-3 fatty acids, mainly comes from fish oil, such as krill oil and cod liver oil. It's also found in foods like flaxseed, linseed oil, walnuts, and chia seeds.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Omega-3 may be useful for:

- Reducing fatty deposits on the inside of your arteries
- Preventing heart disease
- Managing depression
- Lowering cholesterol levels
- Preventing cancer
- Treating symptoms of lupus (an autoimmune disease)

Omega-3 also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

It's generally safe to have omega-3 in your diet. Talk with your healthcare providers before taking supplements. They can interact with some medications and affect how they work. For more information, read the "What else do I need to know?" section below.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of using omega-3 may include:

- A fishy taste in your mouth
- Diarrhea (loose or watery bowel movements)
- Nausea (feeling like you're going to throw up)
- Belching (burping) and flatulence (passing gas)

What else do I need to know?

- Omega-3 fatty acids and omega-6 fatty acids are not the same. Omega-6 is found in evening primrose oil and borage oil, and has different effects on the body.
- Don't take omega-3 if you're taking blood thinners such as aspirin, heparin, warfarin (Coumadin[®], Jantoven[®]), clopidogrel (Plavix[®]), apixaban (Eliquis[®]), or rivaroxaban (Xarelto[®]). There are others, so be sure to talk to your healthcare provider before taking omega-3. Omega-3 can increase your risk of bleeding.
- Don't take omega-3 if you're taking glucocorticoids, such as cortisone, hydrocortisone or dexamethasone. Omega-3 supplements can worsen some side effects caused by glucocorticoids.
- Some omega-3 and fish oil products contain other active ingredients. Make sure to read the label before you purchase. If other active ingredients are present, be sure to talk to your healthcare provider to see if the product is appropriate for you.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Omega-3 - Last updated on November 21, 2025

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