

## Omega-3 Relieves Depression in Some Individuals

Omega-3 oils contain fatty acids that are known as essential fatty acids because they cannot be manufactured in your body but have to be taken in your diet. They provide many benefits to your body, and are also believed to relieve depression in some individuals. First, however, an overview of the more conventional benefits of omega-3 oils.

Obtainable in your diet from oily fish such as mackerel, herring, salmon and the like, omega-3 fatty acids play an important part in your normal growth and development, and are also crucial to normal brain function. They can reduce inflammation and protect you from heart disease and some cancers. Studies have shown the fatty acids to be particularly concentrated in the brain and to be important for cognitive processes and memory.

The effects of omega 3 fish oils on the brain are well documented, and they are known to be effective treatments in some cases of bipolar and schizophrenia. It is believed that they could also be used as a treatment in other disorders such as attention deficit disorder and dyslexia, but there is as yet no evidence that this is the case.

Omega-3 fatty acids reduce the so-called 'bad' low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels and increase the high density lipoproteins (HDL) that take the cholesterol back to the liver for destruction. The end result is a reduction in the cholesterol content of the blood that can be deposited on the artery walls and promote atherosclerosis. Diets high in omega-3 fatty acids appear to lower blood pressure in those suffering from hypertension, and so reduce their chances of heart attacks and strokes.

Omega 3 oils are also natural inflammatories, and help prevent conditions involving inflammation such as arthritis, asthma and menstrual cramps. They appear to help the immune system to fight these conditions and reduce the inflammation and its causes.

They are also important in the formation of prostaglandins that are responsible for the regulation of important functions such as blood pressure, blood clotting and immune response. They are hormone-like substances and also control the synthesis in the body of other hormones. If the balance of fatty acids in the diet is not right, then the subsequent imbalance in prostaglandin and hormone production can lead to disease.

It is in its effect on depression and mood, however, that has surprised many in the medical profession. Ethyl-eicosapentaenoate, known as ethyl EPA, is a constituent of omega-3 fish oil and many studies have demonstrated that this substance helps cases of depression and related disorders. However, are people justified in turning to ethyl EPA to help them be cured of this condition?

In one study involving 20 people, six out of ten people given the supplement displayed significantly reduced symptoms of depression after four weeks. The effects were noticed as early as two weeks and many of the depression symptoms, such as worthlessness and insomnia, had improved after three weeks. This conformed with the results of many other studies that have been carried out world wide. In Scotland, a number of patients were studied who had failed to respond to traditional antidepressant drugs. Of the seventy patients involved in the trial, all of the patients who were treated with EPA displayed significant improvements in all the symptoms of their depression after four weeks whereas those with the placebo showed no improvement.

Of the two main components of omega-3 fish oil, EPA and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), only the EPA has this property, and the EPA works best alone when the DHA has been extracted. Studies and tests have indicated that the DHA appears to be important for the brain's structure, but the EPA for its function, hence the reason for the ineffectiveness of the former in relieving depression which is a function of the brain rather connected to its structure. In fact, depressed people have been found to be deficient in EPA in comparison to those not suffering from the condition.

The original idea for this originated with the late Dr. Horribin who was pioneer in researching the effects of lipids on the biochemistry of the brain as far back as the 1970s. Since then the world-wide research has confirmed his theory. However, the reason why this theory works in practice is not yet understood. It has been established that a diet rich in trans fats can unfavorably affect the hormones in the brain that stabilize mood, possibly due to the fats slowing down the system of messaging within the brain. This kind of effect can cause depression.

This is likely due to the slowing down of the messages passing between the synapses. Brain cells communicate by means of chemicals that cross the synapses, or small gaps between the individual cells. They are not directly connected like normal electrical circuits. It has been theorized that the EPA speeds up the passage of these messages between neurotransmitters and neuroreceptors. Other theories have also been promoted, such as that the EPA has properties of its own that cure depression by another route altogether.

A possible clue could be in the findings of one study on a man aged 21 years old whose brain was scanned before and after EPA treatment. The result showed an increase in the mass of brain cells after the treatment. This was contrary to the belief that brain cells could neither be generated nor

grown once a person reaches maturity.

An individual suffering depression who would like to treat themselves with EPA would have to buy a lot of oily fish since high doses are needed for this level of therapy. However, it is found in high concentrations in a few supplements available on the market, and when choosing you must use the highest grade of EPA you can get, with as low a DHA content as you can find.

There is little doubt now; however, that the EPA content of omega-3 relieves depression in some individuals, although more work is needed to prove without doubt that it is effective with all forms of depression.

### About the Author

More information on [Omega-3](#) Fish Oil is available at VitaNet, LLC Health Food Store. <http://vitanetonline.com/>

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