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Practical Insights into the World of Natural Healing

## EFAs: Building Blocks for Nerve Tissue

Few people realize how their choices of fats to eat every day influence the structure and function of every nerve in the body. And these influences affect all nerve functions, including mental clarity, mood, attention span and brain aging.

## Fish Oil – Nature's Answer to: A Healthy Mind – Happy Outlook

by Herb Joiner-Bey, N.D.

**W**hy does the choice of the kind of fats we eat have such a powerful effect on the nervous system? The reason is that many fatty acids we eat become the building blocks for the membranes that surround every nerve cell (neuron), every cell nucleus, and every mitochondrion (cell energy powerhouse). The quality and proportions of fatty acids on nerve cell membranes affect greatly the quality of communication among neurons. On top of that, cell membrane fatty acids are used to make local hormones that control many functions, including inflammatory tendency.

### **A Case of Imbalance and Inadvertent Neglect**

One of the major causes of chronic ailments that plague multitudes in Western industrialized nations is the tendency for many to have an imbalanced intake of fatty acids. We tend to eat too many sources of Omega-6 fats (products from livestock animals raised on grain; corn, sunflower, soy, and safflower oils; vegetable shortening, processed foods) and too little of sources of Omega-3 fats (wild game, products of grass-fed livestock, wild ocean fish, flaxseed oil, and fish oil). The imbalance of intake and membrane fatty acid concentration

has gotten so distorted that the ratio of Omega-6 to Omega-3 is now at least 20:1, instead of the more desirable 1:1 to 4:1. This massive imbalance interferes with optimal functioning of nerve tissue.

How do we correct this problem and restore balance?

### **First Things First**

In order to get full benefit from any Omega-3 fatty acid source, we must first get the intake of Omega-6 fats under control. Why? The reason is the fact that there are a finite number of places to be occupied on membranes by fatty acids. If there is an overabundance of Omega-6 fatty acids circulating through the body relative to Omega-3s, those places will be occupied by Omega-6s. In order to allow Omega-3s to occupy more positions on cell membranes, we must decrease Omega-6 intake while we are increasing Omega-3. For many in the Western world, this means making some fundamental changes to our diet.

### **Fish Oil: The Real Brain Food**

Fish used to be called "brain food." Today we know why. The brain is the organ with the greatest need for essential fatty acids. Fish oil contains EPA and DHA, the Omega-3s essential to nerve cell structure and function,

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respectively. Also, both EPA and DHA can be synthesized in the bodies of animals from LNA (alpha-linolenic acid), as found in green vegetation and flaxseed oil.

Local brain tissue hormones, made from membrane fatty acids, serve as signaling agents in brain tissue. Any disturbance of connections and communication among neurons, as well as deficiency of nutrients, at any stage of life, can contribute to accelerated brain aging. Membrane Omega-3 deficiency over time alters the course of brain development in children and disturbs the composition and behavioral properties of brain cells, leading to mental impairment. These harmful changes contribute to sensory, mood, and behavior disturbances in adults and children alike.

## Dietary Supplementation

The basic health maintenance daily serving amount for fish oil is sufficient fish oil to provide 1,000 mg of combined EPA/DHA. Fish oil supplementation is best taken with meals. In some instances, much larger amounts of fish oil are used, typically the amount of fish oil that will provide 3 to 5 gm of combined EPA/DHA. In this case it is best to consult with a qualified health professional. Products

emphasizing EPA are preferred for functional support in people who are concerned with mood and cognitive function. In those situations in which support is desired for the building of nerve cell tissue (as in pregnancy and nursing) products emphasizing DHA should be considered.

## Omega-3 Fatty Acids and Mood

Research demonstrates that in areas of the world where consumption of Omega-3s from wild ocean fish is high, rates of depression tend to be lower. It has also been observed that people with higher levels of EPA and DHA in fat tissue, which is the measure of long term intake of Omega-3s, enjoy better moods. Conversely, it is known that Omega-3 deficiency decreases one's perception and the subjective experience of pleasure. Sufficient dietary intake of Omega-3s is vital for healthy brain function and balanced mood. Adequate consumption of Omega-3s is especially important for pregnant women, as depletion of Omega-3s during the post-partum period can result in mood disturbances and irritability. There are many clinical trials demonstrating the beneficial effects of Omega-3 supplementation on mood and cognitive function.

## Stress Management

The Omega-3 fats in fish oil may help reduce the adverse effects of mental stress. The stimulating effects of mental stress on blood levels of adrenaline, cortisol, and energy expenditure can be significantly reduced by fish oil supplementation.

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## Use by Children

It is especially important for children to consume adequate levels of Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly DHA, to support balanced mood, focus and concentration. In fact, research demonstrates that children who have difficulty concentrating tend to be deficient in DHA and other essential fatty acids. Maintaining the proper ratio of DHA to EPA is also essential in supporting the cognitive function in children.

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