OmegaCheck™
Know your risk™ for fatty acid imbalance.

Can fats be part of a healthy diet?

You probably have seen stories on TV or read articles about what foods are in a healthy diet. These include fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and non-processed foods. If someone asked you if dietary fats were bad, you would probably answer "yes". However, fats are actually needed so your body can function normally and absorb vitamins you need.

There are many different types of fat. Saturated fat and trans fat are bad for your health in excess of very small amounts. They are mainly found in animal products and processed foods. The American Heart Association recommends that you eat as little of these fats as possible. On the other hand, monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats are healthier for you, and experts recommend that you switch to these types of fat whenever possible. They come mostly from plant sources, but oily fish are extremely rich sources.

What are omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids?

Two of the most important types of polyunsaturated fats are omega-3 fatty acids and omega-6 fatty acids. The most important omega-3s are commonly called EPA and DHA. Omega-3s help brain function, including memory, and normal growth and development. They also can reduce inflammation. Our bodies don't make enough omega-3s, so we must get them from the foods we eat, such as oily fish and plant oils. The most common form of omega-6s is called arachidonic acid, or AA. You get most of the omega-6s from animal foods in your diet, such as meat and eggs.

How are omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids involved in heart health?

Although it is important to switch from the unhealthy fats to healthy fats such as omega-3s and 6s, it is also important to eat the right amounts of each. An equal amount of omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids (or a 1:1 ratio) in the blood is considered to be the healthiest possible ratio. However, if you eat a typical Western diet filled with processed meat and low in fresh fish and vegetables, your ratio of omega-6s to omega-3s is probably closer to 10:1. Many doctors recommend a goal ratio of closer to 2.5:1. Research studies show that people who have lower omega-6 to omega-3 ratios have a decreased risk of diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

OmegaCheck™ can help measure the balance of fats in your diet.

When should I have the OmegaCheck™ test?

Your medical provider may order the OmegaCheck™ test if your triglyceride levels (another type of fat that can be "bad") or your cholesterol levels are high or if you have other factors that increase your risk of heart disease. They might also order the test when they order other nutrition tests, or to assess whether dietary changes or supplementation are affecting your omega-3 levels.

What can I do to improve my levels of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids?

- If you have low levels of omega-3s, your medical provider may recommend you eat more oily fish, such as wild-caught salmon or sardines packed in oil. You can also get plant-based omega-3s from nuts such as walnuts and pecans and from other sources such as wheat germ, pumpkin seeds, and flaxseed. Spinach and collard greens are also excellent sources of omega-3 fatty acids.

- Good sources of omega-6 fatty acids include whole grains, flaxseed, vegetable oils, and animals that have been fed grain diets.

- Reduce the amount of processed foods you eat. This includes processed meats and foods that are from a bag or a box. Increase the amount of fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables, and whole grain foods you eat. Remember, the first ingredient should say 100% whole grain.

- Your medical provider may recommend dietary supplements or prescription omega-3 fatty acids.

RELATIVE RISK
OmegaCheck™
(% by weight)

≥5.5 Low
3.8-5.4 Moderate
≤3.7 High

The OmegaCheck™ was developed and validated at Cleveland HeartLab with the support of Nutrasource Diagnostics, Inc.

ClevelandHeartLab®
Know your risk.

CHL-P038