



# How To Choose Essential Fatty Acids (EFA)



Many people are confused about the role of supplemental fats in the diet. When we refer to supplemental fats we are considering consuming fats as a supplement to the diet. We consume supplemental fats in order to supply our bodies with essential fatty acids (EFAs). EFAs have a significant impact on health throughout the body

The purpose of this article is to help you understand the difference between oils and fatty acids and their benefits. There are many different qualities of oil and it is not always easy to determine whether an oil is good quality or not.

There are many good resources on the health benefits of EFAs so this article will mainly focus on how to choose a fatty acid supplement. EFAs are important throughout the body. A lack, or even an imbalance of fatty acids can have a profound impact on health. EFAs play a role in heart and cardiovascular health, brain and mental health, the development of infants and children, hormone health, healthy skin hair, joints and bones, prostate health, diabetes and much more. The benefits of EFAs are so wide ranging that everyone should consider supplementing with EFAs. It is even more important for those with health challenges.

## What Are EFAs

Don't confuse oils with fatty acids. Oils contain fatty acids. Just as there are many different types of oils, there are different fatty acids. Some oils are rich in certain fatty acids and other oils will be rich in other fatty acids. Essential fatty acids are a component of oil that we must get from our diet. The body can make the other needed fatty acids when we have sufficient oils and EFAs in the diet.

The fatty acids that we are most commonly concerned as supplements are:

## Omega 3

ALA (alpha-linolenic acid) from flax. ALA must be obtained from the diet.

EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) from fish oil.

DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) from fish oils and algae.

ALA is converted by the body into EPA and DHA, however not very well, so fish oils remain your best source if EPA and DHA is what you want.

## Omega 6

LA (linolenic acid) is found in many commonly used vegetable oils. The average American diet provides an excess of Omega 6 relative to Omega 3. **The main problem with LA is that it is converted in the body to AA (arachidonic acid), which is pro-inflammatory.**

Other Omega 6 fatty acids include GLA (gamma-linolenic acid) and CLA (conjugated linolenic acid) CLA must be consumed in diet or supplements. GLA and CLA are beneficial EFAs and are desirable in the diet.

## Omega 9

OA (oleic acid) is manufactured by the body and is a part of most oils and is not generally needed as a supplement to the diet.

## How to Choose a Fatty Acid Supplement

There are several decisions you need to make in choosing a fatty acid supplement. Do you want to focus on one particular oil or fatty acid or do you want to take a variety of EFAs?

Taking one type of oil allows you to maximize your intake of certain fatty acids. For example, someone whose main concern is cardiovascular might choose fish oil because fish oil contains EPA and DHA, which are the most notable for the heart. Taking a variety of oils will give you the benefits of all the important EFAs but you will end up taking more capsules or getting less milligrams of each EFA.

For the average person a multi-oil blend is an excellent way to assure that you're getting all of the EFAs. Then you simply take as many as you wish. A blended oil is usually 1/3 borage (GLA), 1/3 flax (ALA) and 1/3 fish oil (EPA & DHA).

Another way to achieve variety would be to alternate your oils. Take fish oil one day, and flax oil the second day and borage oil the third day. You don't have to take everything, everyday to receive benefits. The idea is to choose your oils based on your objective and to take a potency that is appropriate.

## How Much is Enough?

A maintenance dose for a healthy person will be less than the therapeutic dose. If you don't have a recommended dose to follow you can use the following as a guideline.

### **Flax Oil**

1 to 2 tablespoons per day is the most commonly recommended dose. Even a teaspoon per day would be helpful. It takes 3-1000 mg flax oil capsules to equal 1 teaspoon of flax oil. 9 capsules per tablespoon.

Flax seed that you eat as ground flax has oil but not very much considering how much oil is recommended. Flax is great to eat but you can't eat enough flax to get a tablespoon of oil.

### **Fish Oil**

With fish oil you want to take a specific amount of EPA and DHA. Fish oils come in many different potencies and concentrations and the basis for comparisons should be the amount of EPA and DHA per capsule. The milligrams of fish oil are not the important measurement. Don't confuse the two. The most commonly recommended maintenance dose of EPA+DHA is 1000 milligrams per day. Look for the amounts of EPA and DHA and add them together and be sure to note whether that is for 1 capsule or more. You want to know the amount of EPA plus DHA per capsule. Then take enough capsules to get between 900 and 1200 milligrams per day. Depending on the product you use that could be from 2 to 7 capsules.

A therapeutic dose of EPA+DHA could be as high as 2000 to 5000 milligrams per day. The easiest way to get a therapeutic dose is to use the newer pleasant tasting liquid fish oil.

### **Borage and/or Primrose Oil**

Borage and Primrose are the best nutritional source for GLA.

GLA has been shown to be effective for a wide range of conditions. GLA is anti-inflammatory, dilates blood vessels and reduces blood clotting. GLA has therapeutic benefits in rheumatoid arthritis, cardiovascular disease, diabetic neuropathy, cancer and skin diseases such as eczema and psoriasis.

Sources of GLA include Primrose Oil and Borage Oil. Primrose Oil is 9% GLA. Borage Oil is 24% GLA. Borage Oil provides 2.5 times more GLA than will Primrose Oil. The average dose of GLA is 250 to 500 milligrams per day.

### **Conjugated Linoleic Acid**

CLA is most famous for it's effects on weight. Studies suggest that adding CLA to the diet has a positive effect for weight loss and lean body mass

preservation. The most well researched brand of CLA is Tonalin. 1000 milligrams of Tonalin provides 750 milligrams of CLA per capsule. Suggested dosage ranges are 2 to 6 capsules per day.

### **How to Buy a Quality Oil**

The simplest way is to **buy from reputable companies** that have exhibited a commitment to quality throughout their product line. Then it becomes a matter of personal preference. Don't be afraid to try different formulas. You may find one to be easier to swallow, or it may agree with you better. Some formulas have enzymes to aid oil digestion. Others are enteric coated to bypass the stomach. Just remember to compare potencies so you will consume the dosage that you want.

Oils and supplements that are cheap are cheap for a reason – cheap raw materials. Buy from stores that know their sources and carry only credible brands. A good nutritional store will stand as a gatekeeper in keeping inferior products off the shelves. Businesses that favor cheap prices often sacrifice quality in order to be able to sell a cheaper product.

If you have questions you can always contact the manufacturer. Reputable companies are usually happy to answer consumer questions.

### **Conclusion**

Developing a nutritional program that includes supplemental oils is not as difficult as it seems. **It is a matter of getting a variety of good oils into your diet and being consistent about using those oils over a lifetime.** Lifetime benefits accrue with the ongoing consumption of high quality foods and supplements.

If you're not sure about how much to take, or what to take, get combination formula that will provide a variety of the oils and EFAs. Don't be afraid to experiment with different oils in different potencies. This way you will find what works for you. If you don't like to experiment take the dose suggested on the product you use. If you need guidance find a store where they know what to recommend and stand behind their products.

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