

Mother Nurture

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Fats That Are Good for a Mother

I always thought fat was bad, but now I'm reading about "good fats." What should I do?

Essential fatty acids (EFAs) are in the news because they are needed for a healthy heart and brain, plus they are absolutely crucial for the healthy development of a fetus or child. Unfortunately, they are usually deficient in mothers since they are drawn on heavily to grow a baby during pregnancy and breast milk is loaded with them, and most women don't have anywhere near enough to start with.

Increasing your intake of one type of EFAs—omega-3 oils found in fish and flax—can help prevent cardiovascular disease, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, diabetes, and depression. It can also make your hair and skin more moist; dryness, including dandruff, is a potential sign of omega-3 deficiency. And pregnant or breastfeeding women can help the optimal development of their child's brain by getting optimal amounts of these important oils.

Here's how to get the good fats you need:

- Do not use refined oils.
- Make virgin olive oil your everyday oil.
- Minimize your use of safflower, sunflower, soybean, and sesame oils.
- Avoid trans-fatty acids. These are found in deep-fried foods, and in the hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated fats used in margarine, and in most baked or packaged foods.
- Increase your intake of a vital type of EFA's – omega-3's – by:
 - § Eating omega-3 rich fish (salmon, mackerel, trout, or sardines)
 - § Using flax oil in salad dressings and other nonfrying oil uses. You can meet your daily needs with about 1 tablespoon of flax oil; it is also available in capsules at health food stores.

§ Taking about 1000 milligrams of a fish oil supplement that has been checked for purity; usually, there will be someone at the health food store that knows about the purity of their supplements. For most mothers, this is the simplest way to consume adequate omega-3s. (Some people prefer flax oil to fish oil due to being a vegetarian.)

Unfortunately, many people lack some of the enzymes or co-factors needed to convert flax oil into the long-chain fatty acids your body needs, which already exist in fish oil. If you do choose to use flax oil, make sure you're taking a good multi-vitamin/multi-mineral supplement as well, for the co-factors it contains.)

§ Using a gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) supplement if you have symptoms that suggest a deficiency, such as premenstrual tension, eczema, or arthritis. You can find GLA in supplements of primrose, borage, or black currant oil. Daily suggested doses are given on the labels.

This column is offered freely to parent-related organizations. If you know of another newsletter that might like to carry it besides the one in which you are reading it now, please encourage that organization to contact Rick Hanson at the email address below. Or just email Rick with the contact info and he will contact the organization directly.

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FLASH: Mother Nurture, the book, will be featured on the Today Show on July 11!

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(Rick Hanson is a clinical psychologist, Jan Hanson is an acupuncturist/nutritionist, and they are raising a daughter and son, ages 11 and 14. With Ricki Pollycove, M.D., they are the authors of *Mother Nurture: A Mother's Guide to Health in Body, Mind, and Intimate Relationships*, published by Penguin. You can see their website at www.nurturemom.com or email them with questions or comments at info@nurturemom.com; unfortunately, a personal reply may not always be possible.)