

# NEW YORK POST

## FATTY ACID TRIP

By MARINA VATAJ

*September 18, 2007* -- THEY say it aids everything from disease to depression. But the latest research on omega-3 fatty acids reveals that when it comes to brain food for babies, a woman's hips don't lie. The recent study - which was conducted by Steven Gaulin of the University of California at Santa Barbara and William Lassek of the University of Pittsburgh - finds that curvaceous women frequently have children with better cognitive abilities than less curvy mamas.

What's the connection between booty and brains?

"It makes sense that women who have more curves - and thus, more omega-3 fatty acids stored in their hips - have smarter kids," says Evelyn Tribole, dietician and author of "The Ultimate Omega-3 Diet."

"During pregnancy, omega-3 helps build the baby's brain. Women use all of their stored omega-3 when they become pregnant, so more of the fatty acids stored elsewhere - like the hips - provide more to the baby."

But this isn't the only brainy benefit of the fatty acids found in fish. Evidence shows it helps to prevent retinopathy, eye disease and depression.

"When people are depressed, studies show that they respond better to their medications when omega-3 fats are introduced into their diet," says Joy Bauer, registered dietician, *Self* magazine columnist and author of "Joy Bauer's Food Cures."

It's also said to help prevent heart disease.

"It appears that there is some reduction of risk of coronary events," says Dr. Jeffrey Borer, professor of cardiology at Weill Cornell Medical College. Although he says the studies go both ways, he concedes that "the general evaluation is omega-3's do provide health benefits."

Tribole says that omega-3 can make a profound difference on the heart, adding, "It helps keep the rhythm stable, prevents sudden heart attack, and that's why the American Heart Association recommends eating it three times a

week."

That said, all omega-3's are not created equal.

"You want to make sure you're eating omega-3's with eicosapentaenoic acid, or EPA, and

docosahexaenoic acid, DHA," she says.

"Because that is the most potent and beneficial form."

Foods that contain this type of fatty acids include wild salmon, herring, sardines and rainbow trout. They're packed to the - ahem - gills with omega-3 and guarantee you'll get the nutrients you need.

And for those who worry about the mercury in fish, there are options. Wild salmon, sardines and rainbow trout tend to have the lowest amounts of mercury.

"With fish, mercury is always concern," says nutritionist Steven Margolin. "But the benefit you get from eating the fish outweighs the exposure to mercury."

But fish aren't the only option for your omega-3 fix; there are plenty of other foods, including fortified eggs, yogurt and bread.

"I consider fortified eggs a secondary source of omega-3, right under fish," says Bauer, who adds that walnuts and soybeans are also a great source.

Margolin, who owns the Manhattan wellness center Longevity Health, likes flaxseed. "It's the purest form of omega-3 - when we eat flaxseed oil, the body changes it into EPA and DHA, which is what you get from fish." To get the benefit, flaxseed needs to be ground and added to food or used in the form of oil - "although that tastes kind of nasty."

And then there are the supplements.

"Supplements can be a good source, but you should always speak with your doctor before you take fish oil," says Elisa Zied, registered dietician and author of "Feed Your Family Right!"

And be sure you're getting a good brand, advises Dr. Edward Fisher, director of the Center for the Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease at N.Y.U. "You know that smell after a fish has been hanging around a couple days? That's the omega-3 that's gone bad. Supplements have different levels of purity - the fish oils DHA and EPA are the active ingredients, but they're mixed with other fats and potential impurities. If not handled properly, they spoil."

Bauer recommends the brand Nordic Naturals.

"It's just as reliable as eating fish - and you should have 640 milligrams every day for good health."

[marina.vataj@nypost.com](mailto:marina.vataj@nypost.com)

### **Omega-3 not for everyone**

It's easy to get dazzled by omega-3's supposed benefits, but that doesn't mean it's for everyone. "The fact that something's a natural product doesn't mean it's good - or good for you," says Dr. Borer of Cornell Weill. There are risks, especially for people who take a daily aspirin or are on heart medication.

"Omega-3s seem to be anti-inflammatory, but they also act directly on blood platelets." He explains that omega-3s coat platelets, effectively preventing them from clotting, which could lead to abnormal bleeding.

"I saw a patient who had a rash all over her legs, which began after she started taking omega-3, on the recommendation of her nutritionist. She was also taking aspirin." The rash turned out not to be a rash at all, but rather was bleeding under the skin caused by the supplements. "She stopped the omega and the

rash went away," he recalls.

Borer thinks 1,000 milligrams is sufficient - "You start to worry about the risks when you go above 3,000 a day."

### **Alpha omega-3's**

There are so many way of getting your essential omega-3 fatty acids these days - in bread, waffles, milk - it won't be too long before you can order an Omega-chino from Starbucks (skim, of course). Basically, there are three different sources: primary, secondary and supplemental. The first - and best - delivery method is through food in which omega-3 naturally occurs, like fish or flaxseed. Secondary sources are either food that's been fortified with omega-3 or foods that don't have it in hugely significant amounts. Since most agree that it's best to eat your essential fatty acids, here's a list of the top-10 food sources. If you can't stand any of it, try a supplement. Joy Bauer recommends Nordic Naturals brand, 640 milligrams a day.

- 1) Salmon
- 2) Herring
- 3) Mackerel
- 4) Sardines
- 5) Rainbow trout
- 6) Flaxseed, flaxseed oil
- 7) Fortified eggs
- 8) Fortified yogurt
- 9) Walnuts
- 10) Sunflower seeds

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