



... because health matters!

# Nutrition Matters

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## What's New in "New"trition?

The world of food and nutrition is changing rapidly. This newsletter will answer some common questions about food products and food components that are currently making the headlines.



### ***What are omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids and do I need them?***

Your body cannot make certain polyunsaturated fatty acids, so you must get them from your diet. The ones you need belong to two families called "omega 3" and "omega 6" fatty acids.

#### **Omega 3 fatty acids are highest in:**

- flaxseed, canola and soybean oils
- flaxseeds and walnuts
- fatty fish like salmon
- wheat germ

#### **Omega 6 fatty acids are highest in:**

- safflower, corn, sunflower and soybean oils
- sunflower, sesame, poppy and pumpkin seeds
- walnuts and wheat germ

Most Canadians get enough omega 6 fatty acids but not enough omega 3 fatty acids. Your nutritional need for omega 3 fatty acids is small. Studies indicate that 1.5 grams daily may help reduce heart disease. You will get that in the following:

- 1/2 tsp. flax oil
- 1 tbsp. canola oil
- 1½ tbsp. soy bean oil
- 5 walnuts
- 3-4 oz. canned salmon, tuna or mackerel
- 2 tsp. ground flax

You should get enough if you eat a food high in this family of fatty acids every day. Eating large amounts of foods high in omega 3 fatty acids will not provide added benefit. It will only push up the total fat in your diet.



### ***Which oil is best?***

Olive oil is a good choice because it is high in monounsaturated fats. It has the added advantage of an appealing flavour. The flavour is richest in the oil that is extracted first from the olives - the "extra virgin" oil. Although this oil is more expensive, it is particularly tasty with salads. Some people add a little olive oil to soups or drizzle it on crusty bread instead of butter or margarine. However, olive oil is not a good source of omega 3 fatty acids.

Canola oil is another good choice. This oil has a good balance of omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids. Canola oil is less expensive than olive oil, so you may want to alternate between canola and olive oils for your cooking oil. That way, you get the advantages of both.

Flaxseed (linseed) oil and walnut oil are now available in some specialty stores. These oils are also good sources of omega 3 fatty acids. However, they are expensive. Because of their distinctive flavour, they are well suited to salads and other dishes where their flavour can be appreciated. If you use one of these oils, buy a small quantity and store it in the refrigerator. It should keep well for up to 2 months. Flax and walnut oil can not be heated by cooking.

? ***I've heard that phytochemicals help in cancer and heart disease prevention. What are they?***

Phytochemicals are naturally occurring substances found in plants. (The prefix "phyto" comes from the Greek word phyton, meaning plant.) Phytochemicals may help to prevent cancer and heart disease. At present, scientists are studying these substances intensely. One of their main roles, apparently, is in helping the liver to handle any harmful substances that enter the body. Phytochemicals are found in many fruits, vegetables and legumes, for example, broccoli, brussels sprouts, garlic, onions, citrus fruits and soybeans. Vegetables, fruits and legumes that are a deep, rich colour or have a strong distinctive flavour are usually rich in phytochemicals.

Although pills containing antioxidants and other phytochemicals are available, research suggests that supplements do not provide the same health benefits as food. For one thing, the chemical form of the protective factors may be different. There may be additional as yet unidentified beneficial substances in food. Also, the combination of protective factors in food may be in optimal balance. Therefore, your best bet is to eat a variety of vegetables and fruit every day.

? ***I've heard that soy products are good for us, but I've also heard that they contain estrogen. Is it safe to eat soy products?***

Foods made from soybeans, for example, tofu, miso and soy milk, contain isoflavones - a type of phytochemical. Isoflavones may protect women against breast cancer. Scientists believe that the weak estrogen-like activity of isoflavones may block certain undesirable effects of women's natural estrogens, thus controlling tumour growth. This blocking effect may also help to reduce the risk of breast cancer. Some studies indicate that isoflavones may reduce the risk of heart disease and some symptoms of menopause, like hot flashes. There still are unanswered questions about isoflavones. Nevertheless tofu and other soy products are safe for women and a small amount daily goes a long way (1 cup soy milk; ¼ cup soy nuts; ½ cup tofu; ½ cup soy flour)!

? ***I've also heard that flaxseeds are good for us. Is this true?***

Yes. Flaxseeds are another source of phytoestrogens. As well, they are good source of omega 3 fatty acids. Up to 3 tbsp. of ground flaxseeds can be added to many recipes, for example, casseroles, breads or muffins without changing the product. They can also be sprinkled on hot or cold breakfast cereals. If you don't plan to use flaxseeds right away, store them in the freezer or refrigerator. Flaxseeds are best used ground up - a coffee bean grinder works well!

? ***I know folic acid helps prevent neural tube defects, like spina bifida. Are there other benefits?***

Folic acid also plays a role in preventing heart disease by lowering homocysteine blood levels. Foods rich in folic acid include: orange juice, spinach, broccoli, and kidney beans.

**Sources:** [A Nutrition Guide For Women with Breast Cancer](#), Canadian Cancer Society, 1997  
"Beyond Vitamins: Phytochemicals to Help Fight Disease", [Health News](#), June 1996  
"Eat More Vegetables and Fruit", [Nutrition Matters](#), York Region Health Dept., 1997