

Pharmacist-Patient Guide for Safe Use of Fish Oil and Omega-3 Dietary Supplements



IMPORTANT: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not evaluate the safety or effectiveness of dietary supplements. These products are not intended to treat, diagnose, prevent, or cure diseases including very high triglycerides. **Before you purchase fish oil or an omega-3 dietary supplement, please review the following questions with your pharmacist.**

Is your triglyceride level 500 mg/dL or more?

YES

Did your doctor give you a prescription for an omega-3 product?

YES

Your doctor has prescribed an omega-3 product because studies have shown it can safely and effectively lower very high triglyceride levels. The potency, purity, and quality of the prescription-strength omega-3 products are consistent and will ensure that you receive the dose your doctor intended.

NO

Your pharmacist can work with you and your doctor to determine if you need to take an omega-3 prescription product to lower your very high triglycerides. Fish oil or omega-3 dietary supplements have not been approved by the FDA to treat patients with very high triglycerides. The fish oil or omega-3 dietary supplements may vary in potency and may contain harmful ingredients.

NO

Did your doctor tell you to take a fish oil or omega-3 supplement?

YES

In general, people should only take fish oil or omega-3 dietary supplements with a doctor's supervision and advice. If you have certain medical conditions like coronary heart disease (blockage in the vessels in your heart) or triglycerides between 150 and 499 mg/dL, your doctor may instruct you to take a certain dose of fish oil or omega-3 dietary supplements each day. Ask the pharmacist to help you select a fish oil or omega-3 dietary supplement and determine how many capsules you should take each day to get the dose your doctor recommended.

NO

The American Heart Association recommends that most people should get omega fatty acids from the food they eat, not from fish oil or omega-3 dietary supplements. Eat fish (preferably salmon, tuna, herring, sardines, lake trout) at least twice a week. Include foods rich in alpha-linolenic acid, like flaxseed, canola oil, walnuts, tofu, and soybeans.

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- ◆ If your doctor and pharmacist advise you to take an omega-3 dietary supplement, always remember to: Use the Supplement Facts on the back of the bottle to determine the number of omega-3 capsules to take each day. Note the serving size and quantity of EPA and DHA per serving to calculate the number of capsules needed to get the dose recommended by your doctor.

Here are some examples of how to use the Supplement Facts label for the omega-3 dietary supplement:

Example 1

<p>Supplement Facts</p> <p>Serving Size: 2 Softgels</p> <p>Amount Per Serving</p> <p>Calories</p> <p>Miscellaneous ingredient</p> <p>Miscellaneous ingredient</p> <p>Miscellaneous ingredient</p> <p>Fish oil concentrate 2000 mg</p> <p>Total omega-3 fatty acid 600 mg</p> <p>Omega-3 EPA + DHA 500 mg</p> <p>Other omega-3 100 mg</p>	<p>Since the serving size is 2 capsules, this product contains 250 mg of the active ingredients (EPA + DHA) in each capsule.</p> <p>To determine the number of capsules needed per day, divide the recommended daily dose by 250.</p>
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Example 2

<p>Supplement Facts</p> <p>Serving Size: 1 Softgel</p> <p>Amount Per Serving</p> <p>Calories</p> <p>Miscellaneous ingredient</p> <p>Miscellaneous ingredient</p> <p>Miscellaneous ingredient</p> <p>Fish oil concentrate 1200 mg</p> <p>Omega-3 EPA (Eicosapentaenoic Acid) 360 mg</p> <p>Omega-3 DHA (Docosahexaenoic Acid) 300 mg</p> <p>Other omega-3 60 mg</p>	<p>Since the serving size is 1 capsule, this product contains 660 mg of the active ingredients (EPA + DHA) in each capsule.</p> <p>To determine the number of capsules needed per day, divide the recommended daily dose by 660.</p>
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- ◆ Ask your pharmacist if you should take an enteric-coated product.
- ◆ Take the omega-3 dietary supplement with food to decrease gastrointestinal side effects.
- ◆ Tell your doctor about any unusual bruising or bleeding.
- ◆ Recalculate the number of capsules you need to take each day if you buy a different omega-3 dietary supplement.

Additional Resources

- ◆ Prescribing information for prescription omega-3 products. Drugs@FDA: FDA Approved Drug Products. www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/drugsatfda/
- ◆ Fish 101. American Heart Association. www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/NutritionCenter/Fish-101_UCM_305986_Article.jsp
- ◆ USP & Dietary Supplement Manufacturers. U.S. Pharmaceutical Convention. www.usp.org/usp-manufacturers/dietary-supplements

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