

Get your healthy fats the easy way

Why I now recommend a “multi-EFA” to all my clients

By Ann Louise Gittleman, N.D., M.S., C.N.S.

Do you take a multivitamin every day? If so, you might be surprised to learn that it may not be enough for optimum health. Mounting research suggests that getting the right amount of essential fatty acids is as important as getting your daily vitamins. To help meet daily needs for essential fats, I now recommend a “multi-EFA” to all my clients as part of their regular supplementation program.

The benefits are usually noticeable within weeks of starting supplementation – one of the first things people usually notice is a reduction in the dryness and itching of the skin.

EFAs are absolutely necessary to support an amazing variety of cellular processes. They maintain the integrity of cell walls and membranes, generate energy, produce hormones and help with normal brain, nerve, and eye function. They also aid in combating numerous health concerns like elevated triglyceride and cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, rheumatoid arthritis, mental disorders, diabetic neuropathy, menstrual and menopausal discomforts, eczema, psoriasis, and even cancer.

Interestingly, noted researcher Hugh Sinclair observed the vital connection

between fats and disease almost 50 years ago. His remarks published in the prestigious medical journal, the *Lancet*, cited an imbalance in fat metabolism as the underlying cause behind a number of diseases occurring worldwide. According to Sinclair, the modern diet – loaded with processed foods and hydrogenated fats or trans fats while being practically void of EFAs – was the primary culprit.

In addition to the health challenges produced by diets high in saturated and trans fats, we have also been experiencing most recently the disastrous results of the no-to-low fat diet trend that reigned supreme for the last two decades of the 20th Century. Just consider the case of my client, Claudia, for example. Like many 25-year-old women of her generation she wanted to lose weight and look good. So, she swore off all fats – even the good ones. Then, it was only a matter of time before the inevitable fat-free symptoms occurred. Claudia complained about straw-

like hair, split ends, and cracked nails. But when she broke out in a terrible case of eczema, Claudia knew she needed expert help. After getting her back on track with EFAs from the right fats, things turned around – and fast. In fact, Claudia’s eczema cleared up just five days after incorporating a combination of borage oil with fish and flax seed oil into her daily diet.

What the advocates of the no-fat diet didn’t tell us was that omitting the essential fats would set the stage for hair and skin conditions like dandruff, psoriasis, dryness, hair-thinning, and the eczema that Claudia experienced. No-fat diets can also aggravate joint problems, inflammation and PMS, as well as depression and other mental health disorders. For this reason the protocols in many of my books throughout the years have focused on the importance of including a combination of EFAs in the diet program.



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The Fabulous Four

Clearly, a healthy balance of EFAs is critical to total body health both inside and out. In fact, each essential fatty acid plays a distinct and valuable role in the optimal functioning of the entire body. Just as you need the right combination of vitamins and minerals on a daily basis, your body also needs the right balance of EFAs for proper

metabolic functions. The EFAs include alpha linolenic acid (ALA); gamma linolenic acid (GLA); and eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid (EPA and DHA). Let’s take a look at each one.

ALA

Alpha linolenic acid, predominantly found in flax seeds, has shown great promise in assisting the body with cancer prevention, improving male fertility, protecting against heart disease, and improving immune function. ALA can also be converted by the body to other essential fatty acids (EPA and DHA) which are well known for their positive effect on brain function, cardiac arrhythmia, and high blood triglycerides.

However, flax seed provides distinct benefits in addition to its ALA content. Researchers in Toronto, Canada found that as little as 25 grams of flax seed daily (that’s about 2 tablespoons of ground flax) slowed down tumor growth in

patients with breast cancer. The benefits of ground flax for cancer seem to be due to the high lignan content of the seeds. My own clients have been using high-lignan flax seed oil for years as a great remedy for peri-menopausal and menopausal symptoms. Lignans are a class of antiviral and cancer-fighting phytonutrients that act as strong antioxidants to normalize estrogen metabolism. Many women report that their hot flashes, night sweats, and vaginal dryness disappear after a couple of weeks of taking 2 tablespoons of high-lignan flax seed oil.

GLA

Gamma linolenic acid is recognized for its abilities in a variety of areas. It is a PMS soother, arthritis alleviator, and major beautifier. GLA is also effective especially for cramping, irritability, headaches and sunburn because of its anti-inflammatory properties. Although GLA can be synthesized from the raw material linoleic acid, found in vegetable oils, there are numerous dietary and lifestyle factors which disrupt this conversion. For example, consumption of sugar, alcohol, trans fats, and lack of minerals and vitamins can prevent the GLA transformation.

The richest source of food sourced GLA is borage oil (20-24% GLA) followed by black current seed oil (15% GLA) and evening primrose oil (8-10% GLA). I can personally attest to the therapeutic benefit of GLA from borage oil with regard to rheumatoid arthritis and morning stiffness. My 76-year-old mother witnessed a remarkable turnaround in her morning stiffness thanks to borage oil supplementation. After taking 3 grams of borage oil daily for three weeks, my mom reported that she was able to get out of bed in the morning without the stiffness that had plagued her for the past few years. She also finds walking and writing easier since starting supplementation with borage oil.

EPA and DHA

Research with the omega-3s EPA and DHA has shown great promise in a variety of areas including hypertension, high blood triglycerides, irregular heart beat, Crohns disease, multiple sclerosis, lupus, and infant brain development. The latest research from Harvard Medical School shows that both of these fatty acids found in fish oils greatly

improve bipolar disorder (manic depression). Both EPA and DHA are deficient in individuals suffering from aggression, dementia, alzheimer's and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In January of 2001, a landmark study was published in the Journal of the American

Medical Association (JAMA). The study examined the diets of 80,000 female nurses over the course of 14 years and found that the risk of stroke due to blood clotting can be reduced by almost 50% by eating fish two to four times a week. The authors believe that the benefits were gained through the omega-3 content of the fish. The evidence is so compelling that the American Heart Association recently revised its food guidelines to include omega-3s. In October 2000, they released new dietary recommendations advising, for the first time, that everyone eat at least two 3-oz. servings of fatty fish a week. The best dietary sources include fatty fish like salmon, sardines and mackerel.



The "Multi-EFA"

While there are food choices that can help you get the balance of EFAs you need every day, this may be inconvenient or difficult if you have a hectic lifestyle. Busy people have a tendency to eat a lot of packaged foods, "convenience" foods, and/or fast foods, all of which are deficient in essential fats and typically contain higher amounts of saturated and trans fats. And, there are those of us who are simply not flax or fish lovers, so getting all of your EFAs from food may not be as easy as it sounds. The easiest way to boost your daily intake of healthy fats is to look for a "multi-EFA" combination, which typically contains a blend of borage, fish, and flax seed oils supplying a balance of GLA, ALA, EPA and DHA. For a maintenance dosage a good rule of thumb is two to four capsules daily of a multi-EFA combination. For those with specific disease conditions, higher dosages of individual EFAs can be taken as a therapeutic supplement. The bottom line is that a daily dose of good fats is a vital component of overall health and well-being. Essential fatty acids should be a part of your basic supplementation program along with your multivitamin and multimineral tablet.

About Ann Louise Gittleman, N.D., M.S., C.N.S.

Ann Louise Gittleman, N.D., M.S., C.N.S., is a leading nutritional expert on aging, diet, and health. She is the best-selling author of 16 books including, *Fat Flush Plan*, and *Eat Fat, Lose Weight*. Gittleman is continually breaking new ground in both traditional and holistic health. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Connecticut College, Ann Louise attained a master's degree from Columbia University in nutrition education. She later went on to attain a Doctor of Naturopathy degree. In 1993, Ann Louise became a Certified Nutrition Specialist from the American College of Nutrition. Today, Gittleman is internationally hailed as a pioneer in dietary, environmental and women's health issues.



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