

LOW-STRESS FOOD Q & A

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How do omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids help reduce stress?

The ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids is presumed to have existed in the range of 1:1 to 3:1 prior to the development of agriculture. In modern-day Western diets, this ratio has deteriorated to 15:1 or even 30:1.

Farmed fish and conventionally raised livestock have different fat profiles than their wild/humanely raised counterparts, as shown by a higher omega-6 to omega-3 ratio. Higher proportions of omega-3 fatty acids suppress inflammation, whereas higher proportions of omega-6 promote it. Inflammation has been linked to cardiovascular disease, cancer and immune-mediated disease.

How do you recommend people incorporate them into their daily diet to help?

People should eat wild caught and naturally or organically raised livestock. They will have a better omega-6 to omega-3 ratio, closer to the ratio we are designed to consume.

People should choose extra virgin olive oil as opposed to its more stressed, "regular" counterpart. Extra virgin olive oil comes from olives grown on trees that have not suffered disease or drought. It has been shown to have anti-inflammatory qualities and benefits in protecting the heart.

People should select fresh, in-season vegetables and fruits that have ripened naturally on the plant, as opposed to ones that have been processed or picked too early. It's easy to know which fruits and veggies are in-season, because they're the cheaper ones! They are less stressed, and as a result, have produced fewer simple sugars, which contribute to the same set of health problems associated with unhealthy fats or chronic stress.

What type of relief can they expect from eating this way?

The case of extra virgin olive oil versus plain olive oil provides one example of how they might achieve benefits. Extra virgin olive oil comes from olives grown on trees that have not suffered disease or drought and has been shown to have anti-inflammatory and heart protective qualities. Choosing extra virgin olive oil as opposed to its more stressed, "regular" counterpart can help prevent heart disease and also has anti-inflammatory properties.

What specifically about the foods on your "top 10" and "top 20" lists is so helpful? Why are these good choices?

The lists are based on omega-3/omega-6 fatty acid ratios. These foods are the best because they have the highest ratios of so-called good fatty acids, or omega-3, to so-called bad fatty acids, or omega-6.

The benefits of omega-3 fatty acids to the diet are well established, but what may really be important is the ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 in terms of telling our bodies whether what we are eating is stressed, and, in turn, causing our bodies to become stressed.

What other healing properties can come from omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids?

Omega-3 fatty acids have been proven to have anti-thrombotic properties, reducing the likelihood of blood clots. They play a key role in the prevention and management of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, autoimmune disorders and obesity. These conditions are all, perhaps not so coincidentally, associated with stress.

How should people change their routine to get more omega-3s and omega-6s?

By simply being more aware of what they are eating and where their food came from, as well as how it is treated on its way to their plate. They should prepare fresh produce from the local farmers market, instead of buying and reheating frozen foods. Doing so will also promote the local economy and help the community, which is another great way to reduce stress.

What should they cut out to make room for these?

Overly processed foods as well as out-of-season fruits should be removed from what they eat. They should also try not to eat animals that have been inhumanely treated, as these animals will have higher omega-3 to omega-6 ratios.