

I receive more questions about flax than any other food. Because taking flax can have quite dramatic results, many people are now eating these dark little seeds. Let's examine its healing properties so you may determine your individual need for it.

Flax is a common garden flower with bright blue blossoms on slender, fibrous stems. (It's the stems that are spun into linen.) The brown, sometimes golden, flax seed is the size of a sesame seed and has been used as a food since the Stone Age. Flax seeds are highly mucilaginous and become jellylike when soaked, which makes them a useful intestinal cleanser and bowel regulator, as well as soothing for coughs and sore throats.

As a bowel regulator, flax seeds must be ground or they'll pass right through you. However, if you take flax seeds primarily as a source of omega-3 fatty acids, then you'll need 1/4 cup of freshly ground raw flax per day per 100 pounds of body weight. For me, and many other people, daily consuming this much raw, ground meal is beyond the point of being pleasurable.

Remove the fiber from the flax seed and the resulting oil is the richest—and most economical—source of omega-3 fatty acids, an essential nutrient. Therefore, to obtain adequate omega-3, I recommend taking flax seed oil. One tablespoon of flax oil per day per 100 pounds body weight is ideal for healthy adults, including pregnant women. (Please note that while omega-6 fatty acids are also important, they are more readily available in American diets.)

If, however, you're recovering from, or warding off, a major health problem you may double the dose. Flax oil is especially useful

Flax Seed

By Rebecca Wood

for enhancing the functioning of the nervous system and the immune system and to counter rheumatoid arthritis, kidney and heart disease, colitis, depression, asthma, skin problems, eye and vision problems, migraine headaches, infertility, varicose veins and enlarged prostate. It also treats behavioral problems such as Attention Deficit Disorder.

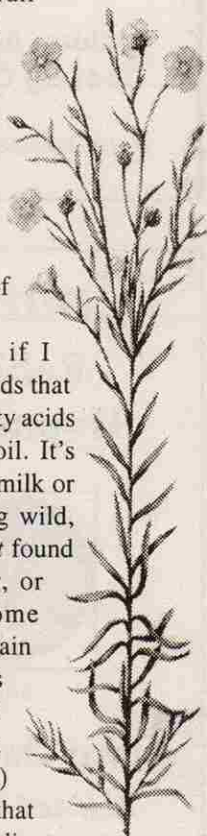
While all vegetable oils become rancid when exposed to high heat, light and oxygen, omega-3 fatty acids are especially vulnerable because they're molecularly the least stable. We avoid rancid oils because they contribute to the formation of free radicals and therefore are carcinogenic. This is why it is critical to obtain flax oil that's processed differently than common cooking oils. Purchase only flax oil that has been processed at low temperatures without exposure to oxygen or light. It must be refrigerated and in an opaque container. My favorite brand prints on the label its date of manufacture and the date (four months later) that it's "best used by."

A quality flax oil has a rich, nutty flavor with absolutely no acrid aftertaste. A harsh, burning aftertaste indicates rancid oil. And the only thing to do with rancid oil is toss it. Don't put it in the cat's dish.

How will you feel after several weeks of

daily taking flax? It depends. Some people may be able to track specific improvement in the quality of their hair, skin or a lessening of various aches and pains. Others may notice a general overall feeling of enhanced well-being. And some people may not notice any obvious changes. No matter what you do or do not notice, consider flax as an important dietary ally to enjoy for the rest of your life.

On a given day, if I happen to eat other foods that are high in omega-3 fatty acids then I'll bypass flax oil. It's available in the flesh, milk or eggs of animals eating wild, foraged foods (it is *not* found in farmed fish, dairy, or meat). While some vegetable sources contain this fatty acid (such as microalgae, chia and pumpkin seeds and dark leafy green vegetables) they contain so little that you'd have to eat inordinate



amounts of them to meet the one tablespoon of oil per 100 pounds of body weight quota. As you might imagine, that means flax is an almost daily given for me.

I use flax oil in salad dressings, poured over steamed vegetables or by the spoonful. I purchase it by the bottle for home use and in capsules for travel. Here's my favorite instant salad dressing.

Ume Plum and Flax Dressing

This tasty salad dressing is so refreshing and satisfying that I use it several times a week and never tire of it. It couldn't be easier to make as it contains but two ingredients: flax seed oil and ume plum vinegar. Ume plum vinegar is a lush pink brine with a deep, cherry aroma and a fruity sour flavor. The brine from umeboshi (Japanese pickled plum), it aids digestion and is technically not a vinegar because it contains salt. You may substitute ume plum vinegar for salt and vinegar or lemon in any dressing.

Drizzle flax oil over a salad. Use 1 tablespoon per serving. Toss. Next, drizzle ume vinegar, using 1 teaspoon per serving, and toss. Embellish this recipe with any fresh herb. Also use it on pasta salads or steamed vegetables.

Rebecca Wood, winner of both the Julia Child and James Beard Cook Book Awards, has taught and written about healthy cooking since 1970. Rebecca integrates the culinary wisdom of traditional medical systems to help people implement a healing diet. Visit her Healing with Food page, or sign up for her next class, at www.RebeccaWood.com.



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