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 healthy diet supported by omega-3,  
 maximum performance and quicker recovery.

# Why Omega-3 is a must for sports people

As a sports person you will no doubt devote considerable attention to your diet, as your stamina and concentration powers, your heart and arteries and the condition of your muscles, joints and bones are highly dependent on what you eat. You will probably be aware, therefore, that a healthy fatty acid balance is essential for anyone practising sports, be it competitive or recreational. Taking sufficient Omega-3 fatty acids helps to support your heart and lung function, protects against unnecessary aggravation of injuries, prevents inflammation, enhances focus and promotes the combustion of fats to supply energy.

Omega-3 fatty acids are found in oily fish, seafood and seaweed. It is advisable though to take a regular fish or algae oil supplement. Sports people who take a daily Omega-3 supplement report that they suffer less from inflammation, their injuries are not as bad and their mental focus has improved. This can easily be explained by the fact that Omega-3 fatty acids are converted in the body into hormone like substances (prostaglandins) that have an anti-inflammatory effect. Experiments were conducted at the universities of Memphis (US) and Tehran (Iran) with a Belgian Omega-3 product. The blood of trained sports people who took a fish oil supplement had a lower basic level of marker substances (e.g. CRP) that point to an inflammatory reaction and/or a higher level of protection from anti-inflammatory substances (e.g. IL-2). Researchers concluded that an Omega-3 supplement is definitely beneficial at the start of the sporting season (when muscles and joints are not quite as supple and strong) and for recreational sports people (so called 'fair weather players'). Well trained sports people also benefit from a daily supplement but because their bodies are in better condition they are more resistant to inflammatory reactions anyway. Overtraining, on the other hand, promotes the proliferation of free radicals and inflammatory reactions in the muscle tissue. Research has also shown that starting even moderately intensive training has the same impact on the muscles, resulting in an increased risk of injury and inflammation. This can be compensated by taking extra Omega-3 fatty acids.

## Heart and arteries

The intake of extra Omega-3 fatty acids not only has an anti-inflammatory effect, it also has a positive impact on heart and cardiovascular health. Omega-3 fatty acids have health promoting effects that are very similar to those of exercise in general. As with exercise, they lower triglycerides and raise good (HDL) cholesterol, lower blood pressure, increase the oxygen supply to the heart muscle during physical effort and thus decrease the risks posed by cardiovascular disorders such as atherosclerosis, thrombosis and other heart problems. Similar to exercise, Omega-3 also increases the basic metabolism, enhances bone mass and alleviates depression.

## Focus and concentration

With sports that demand long, intense focus and concentration (such as golf and tennis), Omega-3 is a definite plus. After all, 60% of the brain is made up of fat, mainly DHA (Omega-3) and AA (Omega-6). A study carried out at Leiden University with a Belgian manufacturer's fish oil supplement demonstrated that students who took a fish oil supplement were able to increase their mental efforts. A daily Omega-3 supplement would, therefore, definitely produce results on the golf course or tennis court.

## Lungs and allergic reactions

Research has shown that the intake of Omega-3 fatty acids can help alleviate effort induced asthma. The latter occurs significantly more often in top sports people than in recreational sports people or people who do not practise any sport at all. This is thought to be due to the increased exposure to

allergens that irritate the lungs and an excessive intake of cold, dry air.

## General recommendations

For sports people a diet with a good balance between Omega-6 and Omega-3 is an absolute must in order to prevent inflammation of the muscles or joints and sustain concentration. It is advisable, therefore, to reduce your intake of Omega-6 rich oils such as corn, sunflower, safflower and soy oil and to replace them with olive, canola, flax seed and perilla oil. Adopt a healthy Mediterranean style diet and take a fish or algae oil supplement with 1000-2000 mg EPA+DHA each day, particularly if you are a top competitive sports person or practise sport intensively.



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