



CHECK IN

with Dr. Ruby Gill

LET'S CHECK UP ON... SEED OILS, OLIVE OIL AND THE OMEGA BALANCE: WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOUR HEALTH

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When patients come into my clinic for metabolic, hormone or integrative medicine consultations, one laboratory pattern I see repeatedly is low omega-3 levels. Many people are surprised by this finding because they believe they are eating "healthy fats." Yet one of the most overlooked drivers of inflammation in the modern diet is the imbalance between omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.

This imbalance is not simply a nutrition issue. It is also an agricultural story. Over the past several decades, modern industrial agriculture has dramatically increased the production of oilseed crops such as soybeans, corn, sunflower and canola. These crops are heavily processed into what are called seed oils, and they now dominate the modern food supply. These oils are inexpensive, shelf-stable, widely used in packaged foods and restaurant cooking. However, they are very high in omega-6 fatty acids, which in excess can promote inflammatory pathways in the body. Many people don't realize that the type of fat we eat matters just as much as the amount of fat.

UNDERSTANDING THE OMEGA BALANCE

Omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids are both essential fats, meaning our bodies cannot produce them and must obtain them through diet. However, they perform different roles in the body. Omega-3 fatty acids generally support anti-inflammatory processes. Omega-6 fatty acids, necessary in small amounts, can promote inflammatory signaling when consumed in excess.

Historically, humans consumed these fats in a relatively balanced ratio, often estimated between 1:1 and 4:1 (omega-6 to omega-3). Today, the typical Western diet has shifted dramatically toward 15:1 or even 20:1 due to the widespread use of industrial seed oils.

This imbalance can influence biological systems including cardiovascular health, metabolic regulation, skin health, mood and brain function. In my clinical practice, I frequently see patients with low omega-3 levels, which can contribute to inflammatory patterns that affect multiple aspects of health.

WHY OLIVE OIL STANDS APART

An advantage we have in Northern California is access to high-quality extra virgin olive oil, including olive farms in the Lodi region. Olive oil, a cornerstone of the Mediterranean dietary pattern, is one of the most extensively studied approaches to nutrition associated with longevity and reduced chronic disease.

Extra virgin olive oil differs significantly from many industrial seed oils. It is rich in monounsaturated fats, which support cardiovascular health. It contains polyphenols, antioxidant compounds that help reduce oxidative stress and inflammation. It is minimally processed, typically produced through mechanical pressing, not chemical extraction.

High-quality olive oil tends to retain natural plant compounds that support vascular health and metabolic function. Locally produced olive oils emphasize freshness, quality and traditional production methods, which further preserve these beneficial properties.

OMEGA-3 SOURCES BEYOND FISH

While fatty fish such as salmon and sardines are well-known sources of omega-3 fats, not everyone consumes seafood regularly. For many of my hormone and integrative medicine patients, I often recommend plant-based omega-3 sources as well.

Two of the most practical options are chia seeds and flax seeds, which provide alpha-

linolenic acid (ALA), a plant-based omega-3 fatty acid. However, preparation matters. For better absorption, flax seeds should be freshly ground, since whole seeds often pass through the digestive system intact. Chia seeds benefit from soaking or hydration to allow their beneficial fatty acids and fiber to become more bioavailable. Incorporating these foods alongside extra virgin olive oil can help support a healthier overall fatty acid balance.

HIDDEN SOURCES OF OMEGA-6

Another issue many people are unaware of is how pervasive omega-6-rich seed oils have become in the modern food supply.

These oils commonly appear in packaged snack foods; salad dressings; restaurant cooking oils; fried foods; processed sauces and spreads. Because they are inexpensive and shelf-stable, they have become the default fat source across much of the food industry. As a result, many individuals unknowingly consume far more omega-6 fats than their bodies were designed to handle.

When omega-6 intake becomes excessive, especially when omega-3 intake remains low, it can push the body toward a pro-inflammatory state.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD QUALITY, AND THE FUTURE

The conversation around fats and inflammation is increasingly connected to a broader discussion about how our food is produced. Many nutrition and agricultural experts are now exploring regenerative agriculture, a farming approach focused on improving soil health, biodiversity and nutrient quality in food. Regenerative farming practices emphasize restoring the health of the soil and ecosystems that produce our food. As this movement grows, it may play an important role in shaping the future of a more nutrient-dense and sustainable food system.

A SIMPLE SHIFT WITH MEANINGFUL IMPACT

Improving omega balance does not necessarily require drastic dietary changes. Often, the most impactful step is simply replacing certain fats with better ones. Practical changes may include cooking with extra virgin olive oil instead of refined seed oils; adding ground flax or hydrated chia seeds to meals; increasing intake of whole, minimally processed foods; and becoming more aware of hidden oils in packaged products. These small shifts can gradually support healthier fatty acid balance and reduce inflammatory burden over time.

THE TAKEAWAY

A common surprise for patients is learning that not all fats function the same way in the body. The balance between omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids plays an important role in inflammation, cardiovascular health, brain function, skin health and mood.

Access to locally produced olive oil, nutrient-dense whole foods and growing interest in regenerative farming provide an opportunity to reconnect food, agriculture and human health in a meaningful way. Sometimes, improving health begins with something as simple as choosing a different oil in the kitchen. •

Schedule your integrative medicine consultation with Dr. Ruby Gill today! Take the first step toward thriving again with personalized, evidence-based care tailored to your unique needs. Let Dr. Gill help you reclaim your health, confidence, and joy!



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