

What should I take to increase my fish oil levels: Krill oil or Omega-3 fatty acids?

In my last article, I wrote about the HS- Omega-3 Index. In simplistic terms, this index is a measure of the amount of the two major omega-3 fatty acids, EPA (Eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (Docosahexaenoic acid), in the membrane of a red blood cell. The HS-Omega-3 Index has many features that qualify it as not only a biomarker of omega-3 intake, but also as a cardiovascular risk marker and most importantly, a risk factor and target for therapy. We do know that the substantial evidence suggests that correcting an omega-3 insufficiency by increasing the omega-3 index reduces coronary heart disease risk and this can be accomplished quickly, safely, and inexpensively.

The problem is that it has been impossible to accurately know how much EPA/DHA one is ingesting and if they are meeting the goals suggested by the American Heart Association regarding O3FA consumption. The American Heart Association has suggested Omega 3 Fatty Acid (O3FA) intake in the form of routine fatty fish such as salmon for patients without Atherosclerotic Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), fish oil supplements in patients with CAD, and high dose O3FA (about 4000 mg/day) in patients with high triglycerides. Until recently, it has just been a guessing game. Now we are able to use a new test called the HS-Omega-3 Index, which was developed by Dr. William Harris, to measure the amount of EPA and DHA within the membrane of a red blood cell.

The next question that people ask is what brand of omega-3 fatty acid is the best to consume or should they take Krill oil instead as a better way to raise their intake of EPA/DHA? I have talked before that all brands of omega -3 fatty acids are not equal in terms of amounts of EPA/DHA in each 1000 mg capsule and one needs to be an educated consumer before buying any brand. The easiest way to answer the question if krill oil is better is to understand one simple fact. The industry producing these supplements is not well regulated and anyone can make any claim about a product. Many people say that krill oil is the best way to get omega-3 fatty acids, but krill oil is more expensive than the standard omega-3 fatty acid supplements. Although there is some evidence that krill oil may increase omega-3 levels more efficiently, it is at very best about two times more effective than standard omega-3 fatty acid pills. Considering the much higher price for krill oil, the potentially small increase in bioavailability may not be worth it. Until data exists comparing fish oil to krill oil on intermediate markers of risk and actual disease endpoints, it will be difficult to say one is better than the other.