

Daily supplements of flaxseed oil or fish oil, when used alone or together with lubricating [eye drops](#), appear to reduce dry eye symptoms, including burning, stinging, redness and intermittent visual disturbances.

The nutritional value of flaxseed oil (and fish oil) comes from its omega-3 fatty acids. Flaxseed oil contains high levels of an omega-3 (ALA) that is converted during digestion into two different omega-3 fatty acids (called EPA and DHA).

FLAXSEED OIL FOR DRY EYE

Flaxseed is found in several forms. Liquid flaxseed oil is the easiest form to use, but it must be kept refrigerated. Although [capsules containing flaxseed oil](#) are more convenient, they can be expensive compared with the liquid form. A large number of capsules also may be required to achieve the equivalent liquid dose.

For best absorption, [flaxseed oil](#) should be taken with food such as drinks, cottage cheese, or yoghurt. Check the expiration date on the label, because flaxseed oil spoils quickly particularly in the liquid form that begins to oxidize in the air once the bottle is opened. Keep flaxseed oil refrigerated for freshness.

[Freshly ground flaxseeds](#) are a good alternative to flaxseed oil for dry eye nutrients.

Despite reports you may read to the contrary, medical experts tend to view cold-pressed sources of flaxseed oil as the most effective. Cold-pressed is the process of extracting oil from seeds. It's important to avoid using heat in the extraction process, because the oil itself is not heat-stable. This means heat can damage the delicate oil. While cold-pressed flaxseed oil may be more expensive, it indicates higher quality.

Recommended dosage for use of flaxseed oil is 1 tablespoon or 14 grams per day of the liquid form, or 3-6 capsules per day of the capsule form.

FISH OIL FOR DRY EYE

Fish oils and fatty fish — such as salmon, tuna and sardines — are excellent [food sources](#) of omega-3 fatty acids.

It is recommended that fish oil benefits can be obtained by eating grilled cold-water fish at least three times a week. Good sources of EPA and DHA omega-3s are salmon, sablefish, tuna and halibut. The dose is about 1 gram (1000 mg) of EPA and DHA omega-3 fatty acids daily. For instance, to get the recommended 1 gram of omega-3 fatty acids, you would need to eat one to two servings of salmon, four to seven servings of cod, or four servings of shrimp per day.

In the likely event that you have difficulty obtaining the recommended amount of fish through dietary means, consider a [fish oil supplement](#) to get the recommended 1 gram of omega-3 fatty acids per day.

In comparison, Omega-6 fats, which are found in vegetable oils (corn, soy, cottonseed, safflower and sunflower) and used in most snacks and prepared foods — whether packaged, frozen, restaurant or take-out. Omega-6 fats, block omega-3 absorption and promote inflammation when eaten in excess.

FLAXSEED OIL VERSUS FISH OIL

Because fish oil contains natural EPA and DHA omega-3s (that don't have to be converted from ALA), many nutrition experts recommend fish oil over flaxseed oil. However, ground flaxseeds or flaxseed oil are preferable for vegetarians, more economical than either fish oil or flaxseed oil supplements. Fish oil can cause stomach upset and/or diarrhea in some individuals, especially in high doses. Other possible side effects include increased burping, acid reflux, heartburn and abdominal bloating or pain. Risk of these side effects can be minimized if you take fish oils with meals and if you start with low doses. A fishy aftertaste is common with some fish oil supplements. This can be reduced by refrigerating the capsules or liquid, or by purchasing brands that promise no such problems.

Precautions

- As with any nutritional supplement, it's a good idea to consult with your GP before taking significant quantities of flaxseed oil or fish oil for dry eyes. This is particularly true if you take any prescription or non-prescription medicines, as adverse drug interactions can occur.
- Be especially careful if you take blood thinners (such as aspirin and warfarin), as both flaxseed oil and fish oil can increase the risk of bleeding and reduce blood clotting when used along with these medications.
- Long-term use of fish oil may cause a vitamin E deficiency in some individuals. Therefore, it's a good idea to look for fish oil supplements that also contain vitamin E or take a multiple vitamin that contains this vitamin if you take fish oil supplements for dry eyes.
- Concerns about mercury poisoning from fish oils generally are unfounded. When present in waterways, methylmercury accumulates in fish meat more than in fish oil and testing of fish oil supplements show they generally contain little or no mercury. Still, if this is a concern, using flaxseed oil as an alternative eliminates this issue.
- Lactating and pregnant women should also avoid supplements with the omega-3 acids and vitamins A, C, and E.