

Street Smart Fat Intake

By: Ron Noreman

Fats are under appreciated, misunderstood and often considered the nutritional bad boy of the macronutrients. The reality is that fats are essential to health and if used properly can be a huge asset in getting lean, becoming huge and staying healthy. Part of the “staying healthy” attribute that would be of interest to bodybuilders is keeping inflammation of joints and connective tissue under control. Keeping your cardiovascular system healthy, your immunity strong and optimizing your metabolism doesn't hurt either.

This will not be another laundry list article about the benefits and properties of essential and nonessential fatty acids. It's all been said by other authors and if readers need this information there are hundreds of references from which to get it. As such, this will not be a referenced research piece. What we will explore here is the practical application of widely known facts about fats that can help you get the most out of this class of nutrients. No brain surgery here, just a common sense roadmap based upon the most current existing science surrounding fats.

In the broadest terms, there are two classes of essential fatty acids – Omega 3's and Omega 6's. The “essential” in essential fatty acids means that these fats must be supplied by your diet and the body cannot manufacture them from other substances. Once again, if you need to learn what Omega 3's and 6's do and what foods they are contained in, check out a multitude of sources on the net or elsewhere.

Now here's where a little street smarts helps. The potent end product of Omega 6's digestion and metabolism is Gamma Linoleic Acid (GLA). It is essentially the octane in Omega 6 gasoline. It is the physiologically active component of Omega 6 metabolism. The best sources of Gamma Linoleic Acid are Evening Primrose Oil or Borage Oil. In my program, I use 4 grams of Evening Primrose Oil or 3 grams of Borage Oil in capsule form. These oils need to be cold pressed (processed from seeds without heat), hexane free (the extraction of the oil doesn't use a harsh chemical called hexane which degrades the fatty acid) and stored in an air-tight, dark bottle which does not allow light to come in contact with the oils. Slightly more evening primrose oil is used than borage oil since borage is somewhat higher in GLA. They can be used interchangeably. Once the bottles have been opened, they should be stored in the refrigerator. Look for brands that come vacuum packed, which eliminates the need for refrigeration prior to opening.

My logic is, why mess around with 500-800 calories of Safflower, Sunflower, Soy or other Omega 6 oils to get the desired metabolic end product that 30 or 40 calories of borage or evening primrose oil can provide. Additionally, Omega 6

oils are extremely susceptible to oxidation, free radical attack and in excess promote inflammation. The more Omega 6's you have in your system, the greater the oxidative stress and the more antioxidants needed to protect them.

I mentioned soy oil in the preceding paragraph. Bodybuilders should NEVER use soy oil. It is extremely high in phyto-estrogens which can have potential feminizing effects and can make getting rid of lower body fat sheer hell. Guys we're trying to get into posing trunks and tank-tops not wonder bras. Watch out for soy oil in Chinese food and salad dressings. It's a common oil used in prepared foods since it is cheap and has a very light flavor.

Next up are Omega 3 fatty acids. There are vegetable and animal sources of Omega 3. The most common vegetable source is flax oil. Flax is a great source of Omega 3's but it does not contain the end-product of Omega 3 metabolism – EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid). To use my previous analogy, EPA and DHA are the octane of Omega 3 gasoline. They make up the physiologically active properties of Omega 3's which provide so many health, wellness and fat loss properties. Not to be redundant, but check out the easily accessible prevailing literature on this – it's important. By the way, you heard it here first – flax has some potent estrogenic properties. I used it for years, now I avoid it like the plague. The estrogenic effect of flax has been widely recognized outside the bodybuilding world in holistic health and mainstream publications. (Harvard Health Publications – Harvard Medical School)

In my program, I use four grams per day of fish oil capsules. Find a brand that is tested for impurities, heavy metals and pesticides. If the capsules repeat on you try having them in the beginning of your largest meal. If that doesn't work, try enteric coated capsules which digest in the intestines, not the stomach. Always buy from a reputable name brand. Cheap rancid fish oil tastes like week old sushi (not that I've sampled that lately). As with GLA's, store them away from light and heat and once a bottle is opened, store in the refrigerator.

Again, the logic is, why play around with 3 or 4 tablespoons of flax oil (even if you ignore its estrogenic properties) when you can get the power of the Omega 3's in 40 calories of fish oil. Case closed.

Now that the essential Omega 3's and 6's are covered the rest of the fats we eat in the course of a day come mostly from 2 sources. The first is the fats inherent in the protein foods we eat (steak, chicken etc). We won't go too deeply into this but use your brain – don't eat fatty red meats, whole eggs, and other animal sources of saturated fats in EXCESS day after day. Unless you have great cardio-vascular genetics, it will catch up to you. Enough said.

The other dietary sources of fats are oil, nuts and some vegetables and fruits like avocado that we use in our diet. These foods derive most of their calories from fat. The best ones to concentrate on are those rich in monounsaturated fatty

acids. Monounsaturated fats have many well known health benefits. They can help burn fat, lower cholesterol, raise good cholesterol and help normalize blood pressure just to name a few. Check out the thousands of references on the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet (high in olive oil), consumption of nuts and diets generous in monounsaturated fats.

Monounsaturates are the most stable unsaturated fat and are more resistant to oxidation and free radical attack than any other class of unsaturated fats. When you consume a diet high in polyunsaturates, in excessive quantities, you become more susceptible to oxidative stress and free radical reactions. This has been correlated to higher cancer risks, accelerated markers of aging and many other negative conditions. This is part of the reason why I advocate getting the most polyunsaturated power from the least amount of fat – fish oil, evening primrose or borage oil.

My program advocates 2 or more tablespoons of extra virgin unfiltered olive oil (a Steve Blechman favorite). The greener the better. Not only is extra virgin olive oil rich in healthy monounsaturates but it also has powerful pigments and polyphenol antioxidants that are cardio protective. In fact, several supplement companies have isolated olive polyphenols and sell it in pill form as a powerful antioxidant. An equally good alternative to olive oil is cold pressed macadamia nut oil. I introduced this oil to Dave Palumbo over a year ago. He now goes through about 16 ounces a week. Dave turned his beautiful fiancée, IFBB Pro Collette Nelson, onto it. Charlie “Arms” Urrego is a macadamia oil fan as well. Between Dave, Collette and Charlie there’s enough lean muscle to apply for their own zip code. This stuff is the fuel of champions on a low carb or carb modified diet. Macadamia nut oil has the distinction of being the most stable-heat resistant monounsaturated oil.

I personally use my oils cold on salads or as a topping on carbs (what Italian doesn’t like to dip bread into olive oil). Macadamia nut oil is heat resistant enough to use in a light sauté. Health conscious individuals should never deep fry. With the exception of macadamia nut oil, all oils should be used unheated. Only purchase those that are “cold pressed”. They should be stored in airtight containers, out of direct light and away from sources of heat. Similarly all the nuts, which I will discuss below, should be raw-meaning not roasted. They should be stored in airtight containers in the refrigerator. All these redundant storage rules and guidelines about heating, protect the fats and oils from oxidation and becoming rancid. When most healthy oils are excessively heated, they lose their health giving properties. That often makes me wonder if the Omega 3’s in cooked Salmon remain intact. I have my doubts – just another Noreman theory.

Finally, other than the oils mentioned above, I utilize raw nuts (organic when possible) to supply the balance of fats suited to an individual’s caloric needs. I place an emphasis on the nuts high in monounsaturates – almonds, pecans,

cashews, hazelnuts and macadamias for reasons stated above. That should certainly not preclude eating raw walnuts, sunflower seeds and others on occasion and in moderation. Peanut butter, which is a bodybuilder staple, is okay but its nutrient and antioxidant profile is not nearly as impressive as tree nuts. Additionally in order for peanut butter to taste reasonably good it need to be made from roasted peanuts. Although peanut oil is mostly monounsaturated, the roasting process invariably creates oxidative activity and makes the peanut butter somewhat less healthy that it should be. Clearly if peanut butter is used, it needs to be “natural” and not the ones with hydrogenated oils, sugars and other harmful additives.

Depending on your caloric needs you can play with the relative quantities of fats in your diet. There are no scientific studies to prove it, but any athlete on a diet emphasizing the right fats in the correct quantities and ratios will discover that “street smart fat intake” is carbohydrate sparing. You need less carbs to fuel you and to carb you up. You can also diet on a lower carb level without as much suffering or muscle loss. Conversely, if you are on a weight gain diet, cranking up your caloric intake with the proper fats will enhance the quality of your gains and help you bulk up to a greater extent then relying on a mega high carb diet alone. All scenarios assume a plentiful protein intake.

This common sense approach has worked wonders for dozens of athletes and non-athletes who have tried it for a least a couple of months. I believe that it takes into account all relevant factors relating to this powerful macro-nutrient.

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