

Fats...The Good, the Bad and the Ugly!

There has been a lot of attention paid to dietary fats in recent years. Scientists have been establishing their role in our country's weight problem and heart health. In the mean time, the average American finds themselves swinging to extremes, eating way to many of the bad fats found in burgers, fries and shakes and some, in their quest for being thin, have eliminated all fats from their diets. Both extremes lead to an ugly reality; we can severely compromise our health.

Not all fats are the same. There are in fact, good fats that are absolutely necessary to maintain good health. These are lipids, sterols and essential fatty acids. These fats come from whole grains and fatty fish. For the sake of this article, we are only going to discuss the specialized Omega 3 fatty acids from fish, called EPA and DHA.

Most tennis players, especially the serious junior players, are looking for a way to beat the competition. This usually means more time devoted to training and competition and less time devoted to recovery and proper nutrition. Contrary to what many athletes believe, recovery is the beginning of improvement. In turn, proper nutrition is the vehicle necessary for the body to recover fully. The ability to recover and thus improve leads to added strength, speed and endurance for the junior player.

Joint soreness is a normal function of this necessary hard training. However, the need to minimize joint soreness and muscle stiffness is at the root of proper recovery. Joint soreness is the body's signal of micro-damage at the cellular level, and the body must use all of its available resources to repair this damage. Because poor nutrition is the norm for the junior athlete including a serious gap in Omega 3's, the body's natural mechanisms cannot repair the damage in time for the next training event. This leads to the micro-damage compounding over time and eventually injury.

Instead of looking at nutrition's role in the recovery process, the athlete will usually mask the problem by using anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen, to alleviate the soreness. This training routine not only does not address the cause of the problem, there are side effects of chronic anti-inflammatory use.

With all of this in mind, there is good news for the junior tennis player. The Omega 3's, from cold-water fish, have repeatedly been shown to effectively reduce soreness in joints. The research is irrefutable as to the value and efficacy of EPA and DHA's role in protecting joints, reducing and even preventing inflammation. A study published in the April 2006 issue of *Surgical Neurology*, strengthened this connection. In a short period, Omega 3's were found to be as effective as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs,

without any of the negative side effects. The study involved 125 people who were suffering from non-surgical spine pain. They had been taking NSAID's and volunteered to take 2400 mg per day of Omega 3 fatty acids for a two week period, followed by 1200 mg per day after that. One month into the study, 80% were satisfied with the results and said they would continue with Omega 3 supplementation.

In addition to a diet rich in EPA and DHA being effective in relieving pain and soreness in joints, they have cardio protective and aerobic performance benefits that no anti-inflammatory drug can touch. Also, these amazing fatty acids influence defensive and inflammatory responses throughout the body. For this reason, they may affect tissues as diverse as blood vessels, immune cells, skin, lung, kidneys, pancreas and blood cells. By preventing overproduction of inflammatory substances, Omega 3 fatty acids may lessen arthritis, menstrual pain, psoriasis, inflamed bowel, and other conditions.

Any athlete concerned about joint health and peak performance should strive to include the Omega 3 fatty acids EPA and DHA in their diet. The standard recommendation is three servings a week of fatty fish. However, the average person does not even eat one serving of fatty fish every week. The hard-training junior payer may need even more. The best way to fill the gap of this critical need is with a high quality Omega 3 supplement. Make sure the supplement you choose is made from health-screened fish, harvested in cold waters free from contaminants. By making Omega 3 fatty acids a part the junior players' training, you will be providing them with the nutrients they need to be their very best.