Some Properties In Cod Liver Oil Can Pose Health Risks

There are good and bad properties in cod liver oil. Some "health" supplements are not necessarily healthy. The consumer must choose carefully. The properties in cod liver oil that are desirable include omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin E. Omega-3 fatty acids are necessary for the healthy function of the brain, the heart, the joints, the digestive system and many other systems of the body. Vitamin E helps the body process the fatty acids and is an essential antioxidant. Omega-3s are essential to human health, cannot be produced inside the body, and so, must be obtained from food or through supplementation. The best know source of omega-3 fatty acids is fish. Some fish contain more omega 3s than others. There are two types of omega-3 fatty acids that have been identified as essential for human health. They are Docosahexaenoic Acid or DHA and Eicosapentaenoic Acid or EPA. These are found primarily in fish. The body can convert another omega-3 fatty acid, known as Alpha-linolenic acid or ALA, to DHA and EPA, but the process is relatively inefficient. It is believed that one would have to consume a great deal of ALA in order to get the health benefits provided by DHA and EPA. The omega-3 found in flax seed oil is ALA. The properties in cod liver oil that may be undesirable include large amounts of vitamin A and vitamin D, as well as contaminants such as mercury and pesticides. The body needs adequate amounts of vitamin A, but large amounts can be toxic. Vitamin D is not commonly found in natural foods, but many processed foods are fortified with vitamin D to ensure good nutrition. While no tolerable upper limit for vitamin D consumption has been established, adequate intake for adults, under the age of 50, and children is believed to be around 200 units per day. Adults over 50 should increase consumption to 400 units per day for men and 600 units per day for women. Vitamin D is necessary for the body to process calcium and is therefore a factor in osteoporosis and bone health. A tolerable upper limit for vitamin A has been established. The maximum amount of vitamin A that a 25 year old man should consumer per day is 10,000 IU. Women should consume less than half that amount. Women who are pregnant should avoid dietary supplements that contain vitamin A because of the risk of birth defects. While vitamin A is necessary for fetal development and overall good health, it is stored in the fat cells and there is a great risk of over supplementation. Excess consumption of vitamin A is also believed to contribute to osteoporosis. I believe that it is important to mention beta carotene, here, even thought it is not related to the properties in cod liver oil. The better daily dietary supplements contain beta carotene and other carotenoids, which can be converted "as needed" to vitamin A within the body and are therefore not associated with the negative effects of "pre-formed" vitamin A. The only known side effect of excess consumption of carotenoids is a yellowing of the skin, called carotenosis, which is not dangerous, but may be undesirable. One of the popular cod liver oil products contains 4000-5000 IU of vitamin A and 4000 to 5000 units of vitamin D per teaspoon. That's really too much for anyone to safely consume on a daily basis and definitely too much for women. When added to the amount that may be present in other dietary supplements, as well as the food that a person consumes per day, it will put most people over the safe upper limit for vitamin A. And, while no health risks have been associated with excessive consumption of vitamin D, no one needs this much per day. For occasional use, cod liver oil would be okay, but many people take cod liver oil on a daily basis. For osteoarthritis and other conditions, the recommended dosage may be as high as 3000mg of fish oil per day. Some manufacturers even recommend that you sprinkle it on salads and add it to other foods. It is our belief, shared by other experts, that this is not a safe recommendation for cod liver oil products. Fish oil derived from the flesh of fish does not contain the vitamins A and D. Those vitamins are usually present in adequate amounts in daily multi-vitamins and fortified foods. Though extra vitamin D supplementation is often recommended for persons over the age of 50, cod liver oil is not the best choice for vitamin D supplementation. From an environmental standpoint, over harvesting of the cod fish has led to the depletion of many populations. Farms affect the health of wild fish. The equipment used for harvesting damages the habitat of other water dwelling life forms.

About the Author

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