

A surprising new source of omega-3s

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(HealthDay)—There's no shortage of reasons to get your omega-3s, which are abundant in fish and their oils.

But high consumption of fish and their oils has created a shortage around the world. In addition, fish can be costly, and there are also concerns about toxins, like mercury, which affect many fatty fish to some degree. Since [omega-3 fatty acids](#) play a role in vision, [brain health](#), reproduction, and healthy skin and hair, the hunt is on for other sources.

One source that's also a boon for vegans are omega-3s made from [marine algae](#), rich in anti-inflammatory and antioxidant compounds, carotenoids, vitamins and [essential amino acids](#). In fact, eating this algae is how fish become so rich in omega-3s.

Harvesting microalgae is not only a more sustainable alternative to fishing, but also algae don't seem to carry the risk of contamination by pollutants.

Scientists are just beginning to explore the health benefits of microalgae and how best to harvest it. But small studies have already found that algae oil capsules can be as effective as eating salmon or taking traditional fish oil supplements. While microalgae is already available in capsule and drop forms, it's possible that we'll see it in food and beverages in the not-too-distant future.

Also, remember that some plant-based foods deliver omega-3 fatty acids—canola oil, walnuts, ground flaxseed and edamame, to name a few. The tradeoff is that they contain ALA, or alpha-linolenic acid, an omega-3 that is harder for the body to process and use than the EPA, or eicosapentaenoic acid, and DHA, or docosahexaenoic acid, found in fish. But these are viable alternatives, especially if you don't eat fish.

More information: The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has more on [the various types of omega-3s](#) and their sources.

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