

# Research Brief for Eye Care Practitioners: **essential fatty acids and dry eye** the evidence to date

Research on the efficacy of nutritional supplements for the treatment of dry eye is beginning to catch up with the interest and anecdotal evidence from clinicians. Here's what we know about **essential fatty acids (EFAs)**:

**Omega-3 EFAs have anti-inflammatory properties.** They have been shown to significantly improve signs and symptoms of a range of inflammatory diseases. Inflammation is a key component of dry eye disease and contact lens-related dryness. Some Omega-6 EFAs have pro-inflammatory properties.

**Consuming omega-3 fatty acids is associated with better anterior eye health, both alone and in conjunction with other therapies, such as eyelid hygiene and ocular lubricants.**

Epidemiological and clinical research indicates that omega-3 fatty acids are associated with a reduction in:

- the signs and symptoms of dry eye disease;
- contact lens-related dryness;

The optimal daily dose, formulation and duration of intervention remains unknown at this point in time.

**Human bodies can't make EFAs.** We need to eat foods or supplements that contain them. Natural sources of omega-3 EFAs include flaxseed, canola oil, chia seeds, walnuts, shellfish and oily fish (e.g. tuna, salmon and sardines). Natural sources of omega-6 EFAs include soybean oil, safflower oil, corn oil, meat, poultry and eggs.

**Ideally, consume omega-6 and omega-3 EFAs at a ratio of 4:1.** Many people don't consume enough omega-3 EFAs in their diet - particularly those of us living in industrialized countries. People also eat too many foods that are overly high in omega-6 EFAs.