

Industry pushing omega-3 content in new products

14/11/2005 - **Omega-3 fatty acids are increasingly common on product labels but few manufacturers are going through the complex formulation process of using fish oils to make this claim.**

Fish oils are known to be one of the best sources of [omega-3](#) fatty acids DHA and EPA but most of the omega-3 food and drink products launched in Europe this year are either naturally rich in omega-3s – fish products and eggs from chickens fed omega-3 rich diets – or they are formulated with vegetable oils containing alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a less bioavailable source.

Mintel's [Global New Products Database](#) (GNPD) shows that 174 product launches or range extensions across Europe by early November made a reference to omega-3 content in their product description, already an increase on the 153 products launched last year.

But of these, only 10 contain fish oils. These include Nestle's Petit Drinking Yoghurt with DHA, just launched in Spain, Plus Omega-3 Bread from Denmark-based Kohberg, [Fish Oil](#) Cereal Bars developed by UK firm Biomedical Laboratories, and a number of milks from dairies like Sudowia, Dairy Crest and Covap.

A few infant products, and a new yoghurt drink from Spain's Priegola, use DHA from microalgae, a vegetarian alternative to the DHA from fish oils.

EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) are the most bioavailable forms of omega-3 for humans. ALA, found in many plants, is a precursor to DHA and must be converted by the body before it can be used. Many experts therefore believe that fish oils are a superior form of omega-3 in foods as the body can use it more readily.

Nevertheless, a significant majority of products being launched in Europe, particularly spreads and oils, are using rapeseed or [flaxseed](#) oil to boost levels of omega-3 fatty acids, while many soya-based foods are also citing an omega-3 content, despite the relatively lower level of the fat in soy.

Carla Ogeia from Mintel notes that much of this growing trend is about positioning rather than formulation - where many products could have contained omega-3 fatty acids in the past, manufacturers are now drawing consumers' attention to their presence in a product.

"Consumers are increasingly aware of omega-3 from vegetable sources although omega-3 from fish is much richer," she told NutraIngredients.com.

"We can't measure the success of these products [through the GNPD] but if we start seeing me-too products and private labels picking up on the trend, this shouts success," added Olgeia.

Processed fish, meat and eggs account for the greatest share of omega-3 products globally (27 per cent of all launches this year), but dairy is close behind (18.4 per cent), followed by babyfood, bakery and sauces.

This year has also seen the launch of some more indulgent foods containing omega-3, such as the Dutch firm Goodlife's Happy Heart Balls, a low-calorie chocolate product with added fish oil.

Olgeia believes there is room for growth in this category, as well as foods targeted at seniors. Despite the good reputation of omega-3s for the brain and health - both prone to decline with ageing - few companies are making products for the older generation.