

Dear Rabbi Fried,

I have been suffering from a severe allergy condition for a number of years. It has affected my breathing and overall physical condition in a very profound way. Conventional medicine has not been able to do very much, as the side effects at times outweigh the benefits of the medication. I have been trying the non-conventional route for some time now, and my practitioner is urging me to try taking a very powerful Omega-3 oil supplement, which may be the answer. This fish oil, however, is not kosher, as a significant percentage is from the liver of a shark. Although the shark it's derived from does have scales, so maybe it is kosher as it has fins and scales? If it is, great, if not, what could I do – is there a way to take this oil if I keep kosher?
Rochelle P.

Dear Rochelle,

I can fully sympathize with your condition!

It's true that many sharks have scales, but not the type which render it a kosher fish. There are 4 general categories of scales, and the shark's scales are called "Placoid scales". These scales are attached deep into the fish's skin, in a way that they don't peel off, unless you would tear the skin. One sign of kosher scales (Cycloid scales) is that they easily peel off the fish in a way that they don't tear the skin. So the shark is certainly unkosher.

Your question, however, has been dealt with in responsa literature going back many generations. It seems that even hundreds of years ago the medical profession recognized the powerful benefits of fish oil for numerous conditions. One question was sent concerning a breathing condition where non-kosher fish oil was prescribed. The Rabbi, known as the "Divrei Chaim" (Sec. 2 ch. 52) issued a leniency based upon the following principle. The *Code of Jewish Law* (Y"D 155:3) rules that nearly all forbidden foods can be ingested to cure a sickness, even if that sickness is not life-threatening, as long as the non-kosher food is ingested "*shelo k'derech achilasan*", not in the normal manner of consumption. The Torah only forbids eating non-kosher when it is eaten in the normal manner of its consumption. When ingestion in an abnormal manner, the consumption is only forbidden under a rabbinic decree. The decree was never enacted in the situation of eating as a cure for a sickness.

Divrei Chaim rules, therefore, that ingesting fish oil is not the normal manner of consumption, since normally one only adds oil to enhance a food, but it is not eaten or drunk on its own. Therefore, to take a tablespoon of straight oil is permitted for the cure of a sickness. A similar ruling is given by another early rabbinical authority, where the doctor prescribed to take fish oil to cure a condition where the petitioner's legs stopped working properly. (Mahria Halevi quoted in Maharam, Daas Torah Y"D 83:5 par. Vehinei, see also Darchei Teshuva 155:16, 25). This rabbi says ideally the oil should be in a capsule, rendering it even further not the normal manner of consumption, but it's not required if impractical.

There are authorities who define "normal manner of consumption" not on the mode of the *person's* consumption, but the *state of the food*. According to them, something must be done to the food itself to cause it to not taste so good to render it in the permitted category for such consumption. (Pischei Teshuva Y"D 155:6). To fulfill that opinion, one should add a bit of vinegar to the oil right before taking it, as the vinegar diminishes whatever good taste was in the oil. If this is difficult to swallow (no pun intended), you may rely upon the previous authorities and take it as it is.

May G-d send you a speedy recovery!