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Fish Oil Doesn't Improve Kids' Cognition

by Art Writ, October 3rd, 2011



A new study suggests that fish oil supplements do not make any difference in the intellect of kids, when they reach six years old. This is in contrast with the previous evidences that taking fish oil supplements during pregnancy speeds up the brain development of the child.

This recent study is also in support to the earlier Norwegian research which found no significant difference between kids of mothers who did or did not fish oil pills during their pregnancy and lactation. DHA or docosahexaenoic acid—type of fatty acid found in fish oil and other foods are said to be significant in the fetal development. The question which remains unresolved is whether an increase of the amount of intake of this fatty acid will further benefit the baby's development.

In the said experiment, the researchers interviewed expectant mothers during

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the mid-second to third trimester of the pregnancy and encouraged them to take fish oil, fish oil with folate supplement, folate pill, and another pill which contains no supplement at all (placebo type).

Dr. Cristina Campoy of the University of Granada, Spain facilitated an intelligence test about seven years later among 154 kids borne to those mothers who were involved in the study. As for the results of the test, the kids were said to have performed similarly and equally, regardless of the type of pill their mothers took during pregnancy. However, as published in the journal American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, the study does not connote that fatty acids such as DHA are not important in the course of the pregnancy.

One important finding of the study is that the children of women with high DHA levels around their red blood cells during their delivery scored above average on the intelligence tests at six years old. The abovementioned mothers did not necessarily take fish oil supplements. The researchers said that the results might be a reflection of the mothers DHA intake from over a long period of time, even before they got pregnant. This might also mean that taking fatty acid supplements for a longer term is far more beneficial than receiving supplements during the term of pregnancy alone.

Also, a recent study conducted in Australia also found out that additional DHA supplements did not improve the visual development of the babies.

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▶ One of the delimitations of this study is that it did not focus on the diet of the children, which may have brought about any significant difference in terms of their performance in the IQ Test, according to Dr. Ingrid Helland at Oslo University Hospital, lead researcher of the earlier Norwegian study.

University Hospital, lead researcher of the earlier Norwegian study.

"It might be that subtle beneficial effects of (prenatal fish oil) supplementation are being overshadowed by other factors (genetics, social stimulation, nutrition etc)," Helland said in an email.

However, she's not giving up on the possibility that fish oil might be of benefit to brain development as the results of the taking fish oil may manifest in the long run. This study only measured the effects of fish oil supplements during their 6th year.

"If a friend would ask me if she should take supplements or not, I would recommend supplementation, but emphasize that we still do not have any scientific proof that it benefits the child," Helland added.

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