



30th November 2010

**HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS INFORMATION SERVICE (HSIS) COMMENTS
ON THE BENEFITS OF B VITAMINS AND OMEGA 3 FATTY ACIDS**

In response to a study¹ which looked at B vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids, HSIS would like to make the following comment:

Dr Carrie Ruxton, advisor to HSIS notes: “B vitamins are essential for the health of all the body’s cells and tissues, including the nervous system, brain and heart, and they also help in the release of energy from food. The omega-3 fatty acids used in this study (DHA and EPA) have been linked with the health of the eye, heart and brain, and modern diets contain below recommended levels of these substances ”

“Looking at the study itself, this was a French trial involving 2,501 patients with a history of myocardial infarction (heart attack), unstable angina or ischaemic stroke. These were not healthy people. More than two thirds of the participants were on a variety of cardiovascular drugs, including beta-blockers, calcium channel blockers, aspirin, or angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors. Average age was over 60 years. They were supplemented with B vitamins (5-methyltetrahydrofolate, vitamin B-6 and vitamin B-12) or omega-fatty acids (DHA and EPA) or assigned to the placebo group.”

“Allocation to B vitamins lowered blood homocysteine levels by 19 per cent (high homocysteine is a marker for cardiovascular disease). Taking supplements containing B vitamins or omega-3 fatty acids had no impact on the risk of heart attacks. However, supplementation with B vitamins appeared to reduce the risk of stroke.”

¹ Galan P, Kesse-Guyot E, Czernichow S et al. Effects of B vitamins and omega 3 fatty acids on cardiovascular diseases: a randomised placebo controlled trial. British Medical Journal 2010;341;c6273 doi:10.1136/bmj.c6273

“Given the health status of the participants in this study, i.e., they all had pre-existing cardiovascular disease, it would have been surprising if dietary supplements given in addition to medication had produced a different outcome..”

In conclusion, Dr Ruxton adds: “Dietary supplements are not intended for the management of conditions, such as heart disease or stroke. Their purpose is to boost dietary levels of vitamins and minerals to help people meet recommendations and maintain normal health. A new report ‘Towards a Healthier Britain 2010’ found that as many as 50 per cent of adults and 97 per cent of older people had inadequate intakes of key nutrients,² and that intakes of fish are now too low to meet recommendations for omega-3 essential fatty acids. In the light of these findings, both B vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids can, in recommended amounts, help to bridge the dietary gap.”

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² Commissioned by The Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB), the UK trade association for manufacturers of branded over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and food supplements. Available at: <http://www.pagb.co.uk/publications/pdfs/towardsahealthierbritain2010.pdf>