



OMEGA 3 FATTY ACIDS REDUCE RISK OF AGE RELATED EYE DISEASE

9 June 2009: Increased intake of omega-3 fatty acids found in oily fish and fish oil, could help to reduce progression of a serious eye disease that causes blindness in older people, reveals research published ahead of print in the British Journal of Ophthalmology.¹

Commenting on the study, Dr Ruxton, an independent advisor to the Health Supplements Information Service, notes: “The researchers based their findings on nearly 3,000 people, all of whom were taking part in a supplements trial called the Age Related Eye Disease Study. Participants were randomly allocated to receive either a daily placebo pill or one of three active pills namely: (1) antioxidant vitamins C (500 mg), E (268 mg) plus beta carotene (15 mg); or (2) minerals zinc (80 mg) and copper (2 mg); or (3) antioxidants plus zinc.

“Participants were also quizzed about their diets, using a validated food frequency questionnaire, and were periodically given general physical and eye exams. Detailed photographs of the macula (area at the back of the eye) were taken at the start of the study, after two years, and then again annually until eight years. The trial participants were monitored during this time for the development of age-related macular degeneration (ARMD).

“An earlier publication showed that the antioxidants plus zinc supplement significantly reduced the risk of ARMD. The current study showed that people in the placebo group had a 25% lower risk of developing ARMD if their intake of omega 3 fatty acids from fish was high.

“These findings agree with two other studies from 2009 which also found that omega-three fatty acids were linked with reduced risk of ARMD. An Australian meta-analysis also concluded that consumption of omega 3 fatty acids appeared to be protective against ARMD² development.

“Consumption of omega 3 fatty acids in the UK is significantly lower than recommendations. The Food Standards Agency suggests that adults consume two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily. This equates to 450mg omega 3 fatty acids per day. Among people in Britain who do eat oily fish – less than a third of the population – the average daily intake of omega 3 fatty acids is only 270mg. Amongst those who never eat oily fish, the average daily omega 3 intake is a dismal 147mg³. In the context of these low intakes and the increasing evidence that omega 3s seem to lower the risk of ARMD, a supplement containing omega 3 fatty acids could make a useful contribution to eye care.”

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¹ Chiu C-J, Klein R, Milton RC, Gensler G, Taylor A. Does eating particular diets alter the risk of age related macular degeneration in users of Age-Related Eye Disease Study Supplements? *Br J Ophthalmol* 2009, doi: 10.1136/bjo.2008.143412

² Chong EW et al. Dietary omega-3 fatty acid and fish intake in the primary prevention of age-related macular degeneration: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Arch Ophthalmol*. 2008 Jun;126(6):826-33

³ Mason P. Towards a healthier Britain. The Potential Role of Food Supplements in Government Food Policy. Available from HSIS.

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Note: ARMD is a progressive degenerative condition, which affects the back of the eye (macula). It robs people of the capacity to see fine detail, and eventually blinds them. In the UK, an estimated 200,000 people have visual loss due to AMD.⁴ This number will increase as the population ages. It is estimated there will be 239,000 people visually impaired due to AMD in the UK by 2011.⁵ Over half of 33,000 people certified as blind or partially sighted in 1999/2000 were affected by AMD.⁶

⁴ Bunce C, Wormald R. Leading causes of certification for blindness and partial sight in England & Wales. BMC Public Health 2006;6(1):58

⁵ Owen CG, Fletcher AE, Donoghue M, Rudnicka AR. How big is the burden of visual loss caused by age-related macular degeneration in the UK? Br.J.Ophthalmol. 2003;87:312-7

⁶ Bunce C, Wormald R. Leading causes of certification for blindness and partial sight in England & Wales. BMC Public Health 2006;6(1):58