



THE HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS INFORMATION SERVICE (HSIS) REAFFIRMS THE NEED FOR OMEGA 3 FATTY ACIDS

Commenting on a study just published in relation to people at risk from diabetes,¹ leading dietitian and research author, Dr Carrie Ruxton from HSIS notes:

“First it is important to point out that omega-3 fatty acids are vital for normal development and long-term health. Omega-3s are required across the whole lifecycle, beginning in the womb and continuing through to old age. They are essential for all the cells in the body, particularly those in the brain, retina, nervous system, immune function, and circulation. There are different types of omega-3 fatty acids, each with a specific chemical structure, but the key health benefits are thought to come from the very long chain omega-3s, called docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). Omega-3 fatty acids are well known for their heart health benefits with a significant body of evidence pointing to improved arterial and cardiovascular health.”

“The group being assessed in this latest study all already had impaired fasting glucose, impaired glucose tolerance, or diabetes, conditions which are recognized as significant risk factors in the development of cardiovascular disease. Evaluating health outcomes on a group of unhealthy individuals is more likely to predispose results to a negative outcome.”

“Participants received either a 1-g capsule containing at least 900 mg (90% or more) of omega-3 fatty acids or placebo daily and also either insulin or standard care. This is quite a low dose for people who already have cardiovascular and diabetes risk factors. Previous research has indicated that omega-3 fatty acids have a favourable impact on blood lipid profiles, and, as would be expected, blood triglycerides (a type of blood fat) were reduced in the group taking omega-3 fatty acids. Compared with placebo, there was no effect of omega-3 fatty acids on the incidence of death from any cause, major CV events or death from heart arrhythmia. However, the follow-up period in this study was just 6 years and not long enough to identify differences in cardiovascular events. There were no differences in adverse effects among the two groups.”

“The results from this latest current study must be seen in the context of other published studies to date. In addition, it is important to note that omega-3 fatty acids

¹ The ORIGIN Trial Investigators n-3 Fatty Acids and Cardiovascular Outcomes in Patients with Dysglycemia *N Engl J Med* 2012; 367:309-318

are food supplements and are not intended to treat, prevent or cure any disease state. Their purpose is to supplement the diet to support general health.”

“Intakes of omega-3 fatty acids in the UK are significantly lower than recommendations. Overall, the UK population fail to consume the two portions of fish (one of which should be oily) each week recommended by the Department of Health. Moreover, the UK National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommends the consumption of 1000mg daily of omega-3 fatty acids (from fish oil) in patients who have had a heart attack. For those people failing to meet their weekly omega-3 needs or those who prefer not to eat oily fish, a supplement containing long chain omega-3 PUFA helps to achieve this goal.”

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The Health Supplements Information Service (HSIS) (www.hsis.org.uk; Tel: 020 7052 8955) is an independent information body, set up to provide balanced information on vitamins and minerals. It is supported by a restricted educational grant from the Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB).

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