

Doctor

PEARLS



Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations

No benefits of omega-3 fatty acid on cognitive function in older people

Clinical question

How effective is omega-3 long chain polyunsaturated fatty acid (PUFA) supplementation for the prevention of dementia and cognitive decline in cognitively healthy older people?

Bottom line

There was no benefit to cognitive function (measured by minimal state examination, word learning, digit span and fluency) from omega-3 PUFA supplementation taken for 6 to 40 months in cognitively healthy people over 60 years old. Supplementation was generally well tolerated. The most commonly reported side effects were mild gastrointestinal problems. All 3 studies were of high quality.

Caveat

None of the studies examined the effect of omega-3 PUFA on incident dementia. Longer-term studies may identify changes in cognitive function. Omega-3 PUFA supplements may have other health benefits.

Context

Evidence from observational studies has suggested that diets high in omega-3 PUFA may protect people from cognitive decline and dementia. Oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel, herring and sardines, are a rich source of omega-3 PUFAs, which are essential for brain development.

Cochrane Systematic Review

Sydenham E et al. Omega-3 fatty acid for prevention of cognitive decline and dementia. Cochrane Reviews, 2012, Issue 6. Article No. CD005379. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD005379.pub3.
This review contains 3 studies involving 3536 participants.

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