

Can DHA during pregnancy reduce problems for kids?

13/06/2007 - **Supplementation of women with the omega-3 fatty acid docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) during pregnancy could boost the problem solving abilities of the children, suggests new research.**

The research adds to our understanding of how omega-3 play an important role in the development of the baby *in utero*, with a wealth of other studies reporting that a diet rich in the [DHA](#) omega-3 fatty acid (docosahexaenoic acid) during [pregnancy](#) and breastfeeding is associated with a healthy pregnancies as well as the mental and visual development of infants.

Mothers are also aid to be less at risk of post partum depression or mood change, and to recover more quickly after pregnancy, if they consume enough of the fatty acid.

Writing in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers state that this is the first study to look at the effect of DHA supplementation during pregnancy on the [problem solving](#) ability of the infant during the first year of life.

The researchers recruited 29 pregnant women at gestation week 24 and randomly assigned them to receive either a daily DHA-containing cereal-based bars (300 mg DHA/92-kcal bar) or cereal-based placebo bars. The women consumed an average of five bars per week.

Once the infants had reached nine months of age, they were tested using The Infant Planning Test and Fagan Test of Infant Intelligence. Children of mothers supplemented with the DHA-containing functional food had significantly better performance for problem-solving, while no significant differences between the groups was observed in overall intelligence.

"These data point to a benefit for problem solving but not for recognition memory at age nine months in infants of mothers who consumed a DHA-containing functional food during pregnancy," concluded the researchers.

Consumers have been receiving mixed messages with some claiming that the benefits of fish consumption, like omega-3, protein, and essential vitamins and minerals content outweigh the risks posed by pollutants such a methyl mercury, dioxins, and polychlorinated biphenols (PCBs).

The situation is particularly sensitive for pregnant women, with such pollutants reported to damage the development of babies.

But a diet rich in the omega-3 fatty acid, docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), during pregnancy and breastfeeding is thought to support healthy pregnancies as well as the

healthy development of infants.

Such advice has seen the number of omega-3 enriched or fortified products on the market increase. Most extracted fish oil are molecularly distilled and steam deodorised to remove contaminants.

According to Frost and Sullivan, the European omega-3 market was worth around €160m (£108m) in 2004, and is expected to grow at rates of 8 per cent on average to 2010.

However, a recent survey by the Washington, DC-based Society for Women's Health Research (SWHR) reported that only 41 per cent of mothers and expectant mothers know they should be consuming omega-3 fatty acids during pregnancy. Questions were put to the women regarding the "*Big 3*" of pregnancy nutrition: folic acid, calcium with vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids.

The finding that women are less aware of the need for omega-3, compared with other nutrients for healthy mothers and babies, implying formulators' omega-3 message has still not saturated the prenatal market.