

Fish group slams omega 3 study

27/03/2006 - **A report claiming that oily fish has no effect on mortality, heart disease or cancer has been described as highly misleading by fish industry groups.**

Dr Ray Rice, a food scientist and technical adviser to the [Omega 3](#) Group, a consortium of fish companies, likened the report, which was published in the British Medical Journal last week, to comparing "apples and pears."

"This report used a faulty technique," he told **FoodNavigator**.

"It is conceptually flawed and should not cause people to regard seafood as anything but tasty and nutritious."

Omega-3 [fatty acids](#) have been linked to a wide-range of health benefits, including cardiovascular disease (CVD), good development of a baby during pregnancy, joint health, behaviour and mood, and certain cancers.

But a large, long-term RCT by Michael Burr and colleagues from the University of Wales College of Medicine, Cardiff (European Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 2003, Vol. 57, pp. 193-200) reported men with angina taking [fish oil](#) capsules had a higher risk of heart attack.

The new meta-analysis, published on-line in the British Medical Journal (doi: [bmj.38755.366331.2F](#)), claimed to review 48 randomised clinical trials (RCT) with 36913 participants and 41 cohort studies. But Rice says that the report only used 12 studies and that three or four of these shouldn't even have been included.

"Also, this study did not use people who have had heart attacks. What we have seen is that fish oil taken after a heart attack can reduce the risk."

He argues that the report might have had some validity as an academic exercise, but says the decision to publish in the BMJ was wrong.

"This shouldn't have been exposed. These studies increase confusion in people's minds."

This is not the first time of course that the generally accepted health benefits of fish have been challenged. The risk of pollutants from oily fish, such as methyl mercury, dioxins, and polychlorinated biphenols (PCBs) have led to some to claim that a reduction in fresh fish intake, especially for pregnant women, might be more beneficial.

But Rice remains adamant that consumers should be encouraged to eat oily fish.

"I recently led the Omega 3 Group in a successful bid for a health claim concerning omega 3 polyunsaturates in the UK. The results of the submission to the highly respected Joint Health Claims Initiative were published in February after 18 months of rigorous scientific research."

"It confirmed that long chain omega 3 essential fatty acids found in oil-rich fish help maintain a healthy heart. Both the Food Standards Agency and the British Nutrition Foundation continue to recommend that consumers eat at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oil rich."