

Martek DHA could bring eye health claim to soymilk

22/02/2006 - Natural oils maker Martek Biosciences yesterday announced that its key product, the omega-3 fatty acid DHA, is to be used in a new soymilk product, which could allow the manufacturers to stress the product's eye and brain health benefits.

Odwalla [Soymilk](#) claims to be the first soymilk in the US to contain [DHA](#) or docosahexaenoic acid, providing consumers with 20 percent of the 160 mg recommended daily value of the fatty acid.

DHA is essential for the development of the nervous system and visual abilities in babies and for the proper functioning of the brain in adults. But because the human body cannot produce sufficient amounts of DHA for the needs of the eye and brain, it must be consumed through foods, such as cold water fatty fish, or in supplemental form.

"DHA is a major deficiency in the American diet because dietary sources are primarily limited to fish. Yet, it is a lifetime nutrient that plays a crucial role in brain development in infants and ongoing brain and eye function in children and adults," said neurologist and author Dr David Perlmutter.

He added that Odwalla Soymilk presents consumers with an alternate way *"to get more of this critical nutrient, as well other key nutrients such as calcium and fiber."*

The product, which comes in a half-gallon container, is available in three flavors- plain, vanilla and chocolate.

Made from algae under tightly controlled manufacturing conditions, [Martek](#) says its DHA, which is sourced from algae, is free of oceanic contaminants that may be present in certain fish or fish oils.

Other plant sources of omega-3s, such as flax seed, walnuts and certain vegetable oils, are sources of omega-3s, but do not contain DHA.

Martek DHA and ARA or arachidonic acid, an omega-6 fatty acid, are widely used in infant formulas, with the company claiming to hold a 75 percent share of the US DHA infant formula market.

Both DHA and ARA occur naturally in breast milk, and a body of research has suggested that both fatty acids have a role to play in cognitive and visual development.

A study conducted at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston last year also indicated that babies whose mothers supplement their diet with DHA have improved psychomotor skills as toddlers.

Last year, Martek Biosciences also signed a license agreement with Kellogg, under which it will supply the consumer foods giant with DHA for use in a new line of fortified foods.

Products containing microalgae-derived Martek DHA are expected to hit the shelves by mid-2006, and are likely to raise consumer awareness of DHA since the Martek DHA logo will appear on packaging, in print advertisements and on other promotional materials.