

# More fish during pregnancy boosts child development: Study

22-Sep-2008 - **An increased intake of fish during pregnancy may enhance development of the infant at 18 months, says a new study.**

The children of mothers who had higher intakes of fish during pregnancy were found to have higher development scores than children of women with low fish intake, according to new findings published in this month's *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

The research adds to our understanding of how fish and the omega-3 fatty acids they contain 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 omega-3 fatty acids during pregnancy and breastfeeding is associated with healthy pregnancies as well as the mental and visual development of infants.

Mothers are also said 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.

Omega-3 researchers expected omega-3 recommendations to become broader and broader, including supplements during pregnancy and early childhood.

This is because of the benefits reported for mental development, and there are studies that show omega-3 supplementation can influence breast milk composition and subsequently a child's brain, he said.

The new results support the growing body of science indicating the benefits of an omega-3-rich maternal diet and improved health of the offspring.

## Study details

The authors report findings from their prospective population-based cohort study. The development of 25,446 children born to mothers taking part in the Danish National Birth Cohort was assessed at six and 18 months of age.

The researchers report that children born to mothers who consumed the most fish during pregnancy were 29 per cent more likely to have higher developmental scores at 18 months of age, compare to the children born to women with the lowest fish intake.

At six months of age, the development scores of the children did not differ significantly, added the researchers.

## Breastfeeding benefits

Researchers also report that breastfeeding was positively associated with improved development. Indeed, children breastfed for ten months were 28 per cent more likely to have higher developmental scores, compared to those breastfed for only one month.

## Contaminant issues

*"Future research and consumption guidelines, incorporating nutritional benefits as well as contaminant risks, should consider the overall effect of prenatal fish consumption on child development,"* concluded the researchers.

Fears about dwindling fish stocks and the presence of pollutants, such as methyl mercury, dioxins, and polychlorinated biphenols (PCBs), have pushed some in academia and industry to start producing omega-3s from alternative sources, such as algae extraction or transgenic plant sources. Most extracted fish oils are molecularly distilled and steam deodorised to remove contaminants.