

Omega-3 heart attack study no attack on omega-3: industry

01-Apr-2009—A German study that found omega-3 dietary supplementation does not benefit post-heart attack patients, has drawn criticism from industry for mismatching a study group with stated aims.

The study found high-dose, fish oil omega-3 supplements had no more benefit for patients who had experienced recent cardio episodes and were already taking pharmaceuticals for heart conditions, than placebo.

Don't go changing

Daniel Fabricant, Ph.D, the vice president of scientific and regulatory affairs at the Washington DC-based Natural Products Association (NPA) said a study group taking pharmaceuticals for serious heart conditions was never going to give reliable results about omega-3 supplementation.

"The study looked at a population undergoing a pharmaceutical regimen to prevent another incidence of an myocardial infarction, and hopefully will be reported as such in the mainstream media," he told NutraIngredients-USA.com.

"Whether it's a pharmaceutical or dietary supplement I think we already know that nothing is a magic bullet when it comes to chronic disease so I'm not entirely sure about the intent of the study. And so the population that looks to fish oil and its benefits that have been substantiated by good science time and again, should not stop doing so such based on this study."

Mainstream reaction

The study has been picked up in the mainstream press with the likes of Associated Press running headlines along the lines of *"omega-3 supplements don't help prevent heart attacks"*.

But even the researchers from the University of Heidelberg acknowledged that the findings did not discount the potential of omega-3 supplementation to benefit the heart.

Their paper, presented at the 58th conference of the American College of Cardiology, noted it was not an aim of the study to determine whether fish oil can prevent the onset of heart disease in the first place.

For heart attack patients *"there is almost nothing you can do better on top of this"* to further lower risk, said lead researcher, Dr Jochen Seneges.

Nothing untoward

Adam Ismail, executive director of the Global Organization for EPA and DHA Omega-3s (GOED), said there was nothing damning toward fish oils to be taken from the study.

"Actually if you look at the first line of the summary, the finding is not that fish oil does not improve benefit of heart drugs, it is that the evidence is inconclusive," he said. *"That is a very different finding because it implies that there is more research needed."*

He added: *"The single 1g capsule of concentrated fish oils used in this study has been proven to reduce mortality risk in patients who have suffered heart attacks, as has the cocktail of five different drugs, some of which require multiple pills in each dosage. Fish oils on their own offer a simpler and more cost-effective means of reducing mortality risk."*

The American Heart Association recommends that coronary heart disease patients take a gram of omega-3s per day, and recommends 2 to 4 grams per day for patients needing to lower triglyceride levels.

The high-dose omega-3, prescription form used in the trial is sold as Omacor and Lovaza in the US and Zodin in Europe.

"What is often neglected in these types of studies is the fact that long chain omega-3 fatty acids are essential components of functionally specialised cells that should be ingested in adequate amounts throughout the whole life time, and not just at a certain age when symptoms of disease such as cardiovascular dysfunctions come up," said Professor Claudio Galli, MD, PhD, a lipid nutrition and pharmacology researcher at the University of Milan.

Sales of fish oil grew 29 percent to \$627 million in 2007, according to *Nutrition Business Journal* research.