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Effects of fish oil on cognitive function

Q CAN taking fish oil prevent dementia?

THE brain contains many essential fatty acids. These fatty acids are important for neuronal function, so they may have a protective effect against cognitive impairment.

Omega-3 fatty acids have to be consumed in the diet as they cannot be made in humans. Oily fish are a good source.

A Cochrane Review has considered placebo-controlled trials of supplements of omega-3 fatty acids for preventing cognitive decline in people over 60 years old. The

participants did not have any evidence of dementia at the start of the studies.

Although there have been many publications about omega-3 fatty acids, only three trials were suitable for the review. These trials followed up 3536 people for 6–40 months.

The participants did not experience much cognitive decline during the studies. Omega-3 fatty acids seemed to have little effect.

Two studies assessed cognitive function with the mini mental state examination. There was no significant difference in the scores between those who took supplements and those who did not.

Word learning was tested in two studies. There was no difference between the groups in immediate or delayed recall of lists of words.

The participants' ability to repeat numbers was not changed by taking supplements. There was also no difference in verbal fluency.

Gastrointestinal problems were the most common adverse effects. However, the overall incidence of adverse events was similar in the control group.

Although none of the trials looked at incident dementia, the supplements had no benefit on cognitive function.

Dr John Dowden

References at medobs.com.au

