

Omega-3 improves menopausal side effects: Studies

By Stephen Daniells, 03-Feb-2009

Supplements of the omega-3 fatty acid eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) may reduce the symptoms of depression and the occurrence of hot flashes, according to two new studies from Canada.



According to the results of randomized clinical trials, supplements of ethyl-eicosapentaenoic acid (E-EPA) led to improvements in both depressive symptoms and reduced the frequency of hot flashes in menopausal women.

Numerous observational studies and uncontrolled trials have reported the benefits of fish oils and *omega-3* fatty acids docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and EPA on the behaviour and learning, especially in kids, as well for improving the symptoms of depression.

"To our knowledge, the current trial is the first to compare the effect of ethyl-eicosapentaenoic acid omega-3 supplementation with placebo on PD and depressive symptoms in middle-aged women," wrote lead author Michel Lucas in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.



"Because EPA and DHA supplements have beneficial outcomes on cardiovascular diseases, have no serious side effects, and might be helpful in reducing hot flashes, research should be encouraged in middle-aged women with PD and depressive symptoms," added Lucas.

And the effects on hot flashes are to be reported in an upcoming publication of *Menopause*.

Depression

For the *depression* study, the Laval-based researchers recruited 120 menopausal women with symptoms of psychological distress and depression, and randomly assigned them to either daily supplements of E-EPA plus ethyl-DHA (1.05 and 0.15 g, respectively, supplied by Isodis Natura) or placebo (sunflower oil) for eight weeks.

At the start of the study, all of the participants were classified as mildly to

moderately depressed, and about one quarter of them were had experienced a major depressive episode (MDE). After eight weeks of study, an improvement in both the omega-3 and placebo groups was observed.

Reasons to be positive for omega-3 and depression

Last year, researchers from Norway reported that regular and long-term intake of omega-3 fatty acid-rich cod liver oil may protect people from symptoms of depression.

The study, published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, followed 21,835 subjects aged between 40 and 49 and 70 and 74 years, and found that the prevalence of depressive symptoms was 29 per cent lower in regular cod liver oil users than the rest of the population.



Moreover, a joint Anglo-Iranian study reported that depression ratings were cut by 50 per cent following daily one gram supplements of EPA, an effect similar to that obtained by the antidepressant drug fluoxetine, according to findings published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*.

Hot flushes

The second study, to be published in the March issue of the journal *Menopause*, Lucas and his co-workers examined the frequency and score (intensity) of hot flushes in the same study population.



At the start of the study, the women experienced an average of 2.8 hot flushes a day. After eight weeks of study, they report that no difference in the intensity of hot flushes between the omega-3 and placebo groups. On the other hand, a decline in the frequency of the hot flushes was observed – with an average decrease of 1.58 per day in the E-EPA group, compared to a 0.5 per day decrease in the placebo group.

“The modest decrease in hot flushes observed in our study [...] suggests that marine omega-3 fatty acids deserve more attention. However, our results need to be confirmed by a clinical trial specifically designed to evaluate hot flushes in more symptomatic women,” concluded the researchers.

Sources: *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* Volume 89, Pages 641-651
“Ethyl-eicosapentaenoic acid for the treatment of psychological distress and depressive symptoms in middle-aged women: a double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized clinical trial”

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10.1097/gme.0b013e3181865386 "Effects of ethyl-eicosapentaenoic acid omega-3 fatty acid supplementation on hot flashes and quality of life among middle-aged women: a double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized clinical trial" Authors: M. Lucas, G. Asselin, C. Merette, M.-J. Poulin, S. Dodin

