Reference:

Ethyl-eicosapentaenoic acid for the treatment of psychological distress and depressive symptoms in middle-aged women: a double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized clinical trial


Summary:

Since psychological distress (PD) and depressive symptomology are commonly observed during the menopausal transition, the present study was conducted to evaluate the potential effect of an EPA-enriched supplement (as ethyl-EPA) for the treatment of PD and depressive symptoms in middle-aged women. In this study, women with moderate-to-severe PD were randomly assigned to receive a placebo (control) supplementation or an omega-3 supplement providing 1.05 grams EPA plus 0.15 grams DHA per day for an eight week duration. PD scores were measured before and subsequent to supplementation (up to eight weeks) including PGWB (Psychological General Well-Being Schedule), HSCL-D-20 (20-item Hopkins Symptom Checklist Depression Scale), and HAM-D-21 (21-item Hamilton Depression Rating Scale). Women with PD were mildly to moderately depressed and 24% met the major depressive episode (MDE) criteria at entry. The statistical analyses revealed that the differences in the 8-week changes between the EPA-supplemented and the control group with MDE were not significant. However, significant differences were found at 8 weeks relative to baseline between the omega-3 and placebo groups in those without MDE. In women without MDE, the 8-week values for PGWB were improved by 22% in the EPA group whereas the corresponding average values are only higher by 14% at 8 weeks in the placebo group. With respect to measures of HSCL-D-20, a considerable improvement (35% reduction) at 8 weeks was observed in the EPA group as compared to only a 21% reduction in the placebo group. With respect to HAM-D-21 measurements, the week 8 average values were 40% lower as compared to entry values in the EPA group but only 21% for the placebo. The authors concluded that the 8-week changes in PD and depressive scales improved significantly more with EPA-supplementation than with placebo in women with PD and without MDE at entry.
Dr. Holub's Comments:

The present results are of significant interest since health surveys have indicated a high level of psychological distress (PD) amongst adult women along with a high prevalence of depressive symptomology and an increased use of health care resources. The total intake of EPA plus DHA in the present study (1200 mg/day) is commonly consumed through dietary (fish/marine) sources in a considerable portion of the Japanese population. Confirmation of the present study with more extensive and prolonged durations of omega-3 supplementation is warranted. Furthermore, future studies using differing dosages of EPA alone, DHA alone, and varying mixtures of these two long-chain omega-3 fatty acids would aid considerably in the future possible offering of recommended complementary intakes of these omega-3 polyunsaturates in such sub-groups with psychological distress and depressive symptoms within the population.