Reference:

Omega-3 Treatment of Childhood Depression: A Controlled, Double-Blind Pilot Study


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Summary:

This clinical trial evaluated the potential for supplementation with omega-3 fatty acids as DHA plus EPA (combined) to potentially attenuate measurements of depression in children suffering from major depressive disorder (ages ranging from 8-12.5 years with an overall average range of 10 years for the group studied). As pointed out by the authors, major depression disorder is a recurrent and somewhat common disorder in children – often accompanied by poor psychosocial outcomes, substance abuse, and increased risk of suicide. This condition, which affects approximately 3% of children, requires clinical care.

In the omega-3 trial, measurements of depression were performed throughout (at entry, 2, 4, 8, 12, and 16 weeks) including rating by the Childhood Depression Rating Scale (CDRS). In this controlled double-blind pilot study, patients received a placebo (control) capsule or a daily supplement for 16 weeks providing 380-400 mg EPA plus 180-200 mg DHA daily. Seven out of ten children on DHA/EPA omega-3 supplementation had a greater than 50% reduction in their CDRS scores while none of the 10 children on placebo exhibited a greater than 50% reduction. Furthermore, four out of ten children on DHA/EPA supplementation met the remission criteria of a CDRS score <29 at study exit while no patient in the control group met this criteria.

Dr. Holub's Comments:
While previous studies in adults have evaluated the potential application of omega-3 ‘therapeutics’ via complementary management in adults with depressive disorders, this study using a combination of DHA plus EPA appears to be the first in pre-pubertal childhood depression. It is anticipated that confirmation of the presenting findings in expanded future trials could have an eventual impact on the treatment strategies offered by the pediatric psychiatrist in their patients presented with childhood depression. It is noteworthy that the level of supplementation employed (approximately 600 mg of DHA plus 200 mg of EPA combined per day) can be readily attained by selective dietary/food choices (fish and/or functional foods enriched with DHA plus EPA). Furthermore, the level of DHA plus EPA consumed daily via supplementation in the present study is similar to current intake levels of DHA plus EPA (combined) in some populations such as in Japan.