Reference:

Omega-3 fatty acid supplementation in patients with recurrent self harm: Single-centre double-blind randomised control trial


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Summary:

Since previously-published trials have shown promising results using DHA/EPA omega-3 fatty acid supplementation in patients with various psychiatric disorders, the present study was conducted in patients with a history of recurrent self-harm. The 49 patients studied were randomized to either receive a placebo (control) or supplementation with 2.1 g of DHA/EPA combined (900 mg DHA + 1200 mg EPA) daily for a 12 week period in addition to standard psychiatric care. A significant improvement in scores for depression (measured by the Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression and Beck Depression Inventory) were found in the supplemented group relative to controls. In addition, the omega-3 group exhibited a greater improvement in scores for suicide risk and an overall improvement for daily stresses (measured by Perceived Stress Scale and Daily Hassles and Uplifts Scale). No significant effect of omega-3 supplementation on scores for aggression, hostility, and impulsivity were found. The authors conclude that larger studies in the future on follow-up will help to determine if greater intakes of omega-3 fatty acids may serve as a reversible risk factor for those with a tendency for self harm.

Dr. Holub's Comments:

It is of interest to note that the majority of patients in the present study were taking psychotropic medication and all were on anti-depressants. Thus, the use of DHA/EPA omega-3 fatty acid
supplementation was not alternative to standard medical/ psychiatric care but rather was in addition to such. The level of supplementation (2.1 g DHA/EPA combined per day) is well above current North American intakes per day from dietary sources (mainly fish) which amounts to approximately 0.15 g/day. However, the Food and Drug Administration in the U.S. have indicated that up to 3 g of DHA/EPA omega-3 per day is considered to be within the upper safe range for the majority of the population.