
Omega-3 fatty acids may help kids with depression

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Treatment with omega-3 fatty acids, the type found in fish oils, appears to benefit children suffering from clinical depression, according to pilot study conducted in Israel.

The results of some studies in adults with major depressive disorder have suggested that omega-3 fatty acids may be an effective add-on therapy. However, the effects of this supplement in children with the disorder are unknown, researchers explain in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

Dr. R. H. Belmaker, of Ben Gurion University of the Negev, and colleagues conducted a trial in which 28 depressed children between the ages of 6 and 12 years old were randomly assigned to omega-3 fatty acids or placebo.

Standardized depression scores were used to assess the children at the start of the study and throughout the 16-week trial.

Twenty children who remained in the study for at least 1 month were included in the analysis.

Seven out of 10 children in the active treatment group and none of the children in the placebo group had a reduction in depression scores of more than 50 percent. Four children in the omega-3 group achieved remission.

No clinically relevant side effects were reported, the researchers say.

The omega-3 fatty acid supplement used in the study was "a combination of eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid that is commonly available as an over-the-counter preparation," the researchers note.

Belmaker and colleagues conclude that the effects of omega-3 fatty acids are "highly significant." This is the first such study, they believe, that has been conducted in children.

SOURCE: *American Journal of Psychiatry*, June 2006.