



Doing Life Intentionally Together

11/5/2002

Omega 3 fats may benefit those with depression.

Source: Arch Gen Psychiatry

Date Added:11/5/2002

Date to be Archived:11/19/2002

It is estimated that 19 million people in the US suffer from depression at one time each year.¹ Although life is filled with unexpected events such as the death of a loved one, loss of a job, major illness, or other catastrophic events, not everybody becomes depressed. Most individuals suffer only temporary feelings of depression and find ways to adjust to life's challenges. However, there are certain individuals who experience a major depressive episode when faced by stressful situations.

Serotonin is a key neurotransmitter for maintaining mental and emotional health. Low serotonin plays a big role in depression. Prolonged stress—physical, mental, or emotional can deplete the body's serotonin supply. A host of other health problems can contribute to depression by robbing serotonin, including adrenal exhaustion, hypothyroidism, heavy metal toxicity, and "leaky gut" syndrome with subsequent food intolerance. Deficiencies in nutrients such as vitamin B12, folic acid, and certain amino acids can also be involved.

Studies have shown a relationship between symptoms of depression and the a ratio of low omega-3 to high omega-6 fats in the diet.² The quantity and ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 is critical because these fatty acids serve as building blocks for prostaglandins, a group of hormone-like substances that regulate many important aspects of biological function throughout the body.

A recent study published in the Archives of General Psychiatry stated that low levels of omega 3 fats are common in depression. The researchers wanted to test the effectiveness of supplementing depressed patients with ethyl-eicosapentaenoate (omega 3 oil). This investigation included 70 patients with persistent depression who were not responding well to antidepressants. These individuals received either a placebo or omega 3 fats in the dosages of 1, 2, or 4 grams daily. The group that took 1 gram daily had an improved outcome when compared to the placebo group, in fact, all patients who received 1 gram improved. The authors of this study concluded that, "Treatment with ethyl-eicosapentaenoate at a dosage of 1 g/d was effective in treating depression in patients who remained depressed despite adequate standard therapy."³

1. National Institute of Mental Health, 1999.

2. Maes M, et al. Fatty acid composition in major depression: decreased omega 3 fractions in cholesteryl esters and increased C20: 4 omega 6/C20:5 omega 3 ratio in cholesteryl esters and phospholipids. J Affect Disord. Apr1996;38(1):35-46.

3. Peet M, et al. A Dose-Ranging Study of the Effects of Ethyl-Eicosapentaenoate in Patients With Ongoing Depression Despite Apparently Adequate Treatment With Standard Drugs. Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2002;59:913-919.

This information is not intended to replace medical care; to diagnose, to treat or to cure.