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17

32

4

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Omega-3 supplementation backed for depression in elderly


 By Nathan Gray+, [Contact the editor](#)
 12-Oct-2012

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Supplementation with omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA) could help to reduce the symptoms of depression in elderly people, according to new research.

The study – published in *Nutrition Journal* – evaluated whether a supplement containing omega-3 PUFA improves depressive symptoms in depressed elderly patients, and whether the blood fatty acid pattern is correlated with these changes.

Led by Professor Angela Rizzo from the University of Milan, the research team reveal that supplementation with 2.5 grams of omega-3 per day reduced symptoms of depression in elderly people. They added that these changes were accompanied by changes in omega-3 PUFA status, which had been found to be very low in those with depression.

“Our data clearly demonstrate that elderly depression is characterized by very low levels of omega-3 PUFA, in particular of eicosapentanoic acid, in red blood cell membranes compared to healthy subjects,” said the researchers.

“This study confirms the positive effects of omega-3 PUFA supplementation in the treatment of elderly depression,” they added.

Depressive problem

The authors note that depression is one of the most frequently missed diagnoses in elderly people, despite the fact that the condition has *“obvious negative effects on quality of life.”*

Indeed depression in later life is very common, with both major and minor depression reported in 13% of community dwelling older adults, 24% of older medical out-patients, 30% of older acute care patients and 43% of nursing home dwelling older adults, said Rizzo and her team.

“Depression is often reversible with prompt and appropriate treatment. However, if left untreated, depression may result in the onset of physical, cognitive and social impairment, as well as delayed recovery from medical illness and



Omega-3 supplements could help to battle depression in elderly people, the new small scale study suggests.

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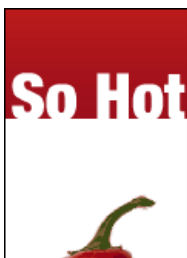


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surgery," they said – noting that many studies have suggested that omega-3 rich PUFAs could be of use in the management of depression.

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Study details

In the new research, Rizzo and her analysed data from 46 depressed females aged between 66 and 95 years using the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS). In the randomised trial 22 women were supplemented with 2.5 grams per day for eight weeks - with an omega-3 product with a 2:1 ratio of eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Twenty four women received a placebo supplement for the eight week period.

The team revealed that mean GDS score and omega-3 levels in whole blood and red blood cell membrane phospholipids, were significantly lower after 2 months supplementation with the omega-3, compared to placebo.

However the researchers said the correlation between immunological parameters, GDS score and arachidonic acid (AA) to EPA ratio in blood and membrane "was surprisingly modest."

"We speculate that age-related immune imbalance might be the cause of these poor correlations," they said. "Therefore, further studies are needed in the field of omega-3 PUFA and immunity in elderly subjects."

Source: *Nutrition Journal*

Volume 11, Issue 82, doi: [10.1186/1475-2891-11-82](https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-2891-11-82)

"Comparison between the AA/EPA ratio in depressed and non depressed elderly females: omega-3 fatty acid supplementation correlates with improved symptoms but does not change immunological parameters"

Authors : A.M. Rizzo, P.A. Corsetto, G. Montorfano, A. Opizzi, *et al*

Keywords: omega-3, depression, EPA, DHA

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