

Despite health benefits, most children and adults have a 'nutrition gap' in omega-3 fatty acids

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Because of a diet low in fish and seafood, children and adults in North America and other parts of the world, have a "nutrition gap" of omega-3 fatty acids, particularly docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), according to a presentation at the 2013 Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) Annual Meeting & Expo in Chicago.

Numerous studies have found that DHA and EPA can prevent or minimize the effects of inflammatory disorders, such as rheumatoid arthritis, promote cardiovascular health and limit the effects of heart disease, said Bruce J. Holub, Ph.D., professor emeritus at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario.

For children, adequate levels of DHA are critical for normal brain and nervous system development, said Alex Richardson, Ph.D., senior research fellow at the Centre for Evidence-Based Intervention at the University of Oxford in Oxford, England, founder and director of the United Kingdom charity Food and Behavior (FAB) Research; and author of the book "They are What You Feed Them."

Richardson said the "physical risks to children from a nutritionally poor [diet](#) are now acknowledged, but the damage being done to their behavior, their learning abilities and mood is not."

Richardson cited numerous studies linking low levels of DHA in children and expectant mothers to a wide-range of cognitive and behavioral disorders.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that half of the fish consumed in the world today is cultivated on farms without diets that foster omega-3 nutrients,said Holub.

The average American consumes 1.6 grams of omega-3 fatty acids, of which only .2 grams (200 milligrams) are DHA or EPA. The American Heart Association recommends 500 milligrams of DHA and EPA each day for healthy [adults](#) and 900 mg/day (one fatty fish meal per day, or one omega-3 supplement) for patients with coronary disease.

Richardson recommends 500 mgs of omega-3 fatty acids a day for children and 1 gram a day for pregnant women.

"I applaud any attempts (to recommend and encourage supplements) in the diets of mothers and women of childbearing age," said Richardson, who believes that consistent, pervasive diets lacking in omega-3 [fatty acids](#) could results in genetic modifications affecting future generations.

"It's never too late" to address this issue, said Richardson.

Provided by Institute of Food Technologists

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