

DHA during pregnancy does not appear to improve cognitive outcomes for children

May 3 2014

Although there are recommendations for pregnant women to increase their intake of the omega-3 fatty acid docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) to improve fetal brain development, a randomized trial finds that prenatal DHA supplementation did not result in improved cognitive, problem-solving or language abilities for children at four years of age, according to the study in the May 7 issue of *JAMA*, a theme issue on child health. This issue is being released early to coincide with the Pediatric Academic Societies Annual Meeting.

Maria Makrides, B.Sc., B.N.D., Ph.D., of the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute, Adelaide, Australia and colleagues conducted longer-term follow-up from a previously published study in which [pregnant women](#) received 800 mg/d of DHA or placebo. In the initial study, the researchers found that average cognitive, language, and motor scores did not differ between children at 18 months of age. For the follow-up study, outcomes were assessed at 4 years, a time point when any subtle effects on development should have emerged and can be more reliably assessed.

The majority (91.9 percent) of eligible families (DHA group, n = 313; control group, n = 333) participated in the follow-up. The authors found that measures of cognition, the ability to perform complex mental processing, language, and executive functioning (such as memory, reasoning, problem solving) did not differ significantly between groups.

"Our data do not support prenatal DHA supplementation to enhance

early childhood development."

More information: [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2014.2194](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2014.2194)

Provided by The JAMA Network Journals

Citation: DHA during pregnancy does not appear to improve cognitive outcomes for children (2014, May 3) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-05-dha-pregnancy-cognitive-outcomes-children.html>

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