

# Pregnant Alberta women not getting enough omega-3 fatty acids: study

July 14 2015, by Helen Metella

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Most pregnant and lactating women in Alberta are not getting the recommended levels of omega-3 fatty acids vital to their health and their babies' development, according to new UAlberta research.

Nearly three-quarters of pregnant and lactating women in Alberta are not meeting the recommended intake of specific omega-3 fatty acids vital to their babies' development and to their own health, according to new research from the University of Alberta.

In a study of 600 pregnant women in Edmonton and Calgary, only 27 per

cent were meeting the International Society for the Study of Fatty Acids and Lipids' recommended minimum of 200 mg per day of DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) during pregnancy. By three months postpartum, the rate dropped to 25 per cent.

DHA is the major [omega-3 fatty acid](#) required during pregnancy for fetal and placental development, and is critical for [infant brain development](#) and other growth in every cell of the body. After a baby's birth, DHA, along with two other [fatty acids](#) (known collectively as omega-3 LCPUFA) also helps babies' health, particularly their neurocognitive development.

"DHA is also important to a mother's health," said Catherine Field, lead researcher on the study and professor of nutrition in the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences. "Low levels in the body have been associated with depression."

The recommended intake of DHA during pregnancy could be met by consuming one to two portions per week of fish that are high in omega-3 fatty acids. Health Canada guidelines recommend salmon, tuna, herring and trout as the best sources.

Taking supplements also significantly improved the likelihood [pregnant women](#) would meet the recommended amounts, according to the study, which used the large Alberta-based maternal and infant birth cohort called Alberta Pregnancy Outcomes and Nutrition (APrON).

"Women who took a supplement containing DHA were 10.6 and 11.1 times more likely to meet the current EU consensus for pregnancy and postpartum respectively," said the study. However, 44 per cent of women in the study who reported taking a supplement during pregnancy were no longer doing so at three months postpartum, which led researchers to suggest that nutritional counselling about the benefits of a

supplement should extend beyond pregnancy.

The study was published in *Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism*.

**More information:** "Women who take n-3 long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acid supplements during pregnancy and lactation meet the recommended intake." *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism*, 2015, 40:474-481, [DOI: 10.1139/apnm-2014-0313](https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2014-0313)

Provided by University of Alberta

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