

Omega fish oils don't improve children's reading skills or memory, study finds

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Credit: University of Birmingham

New research has found no evidence Omega-3 fish oil supplements help aid or improve the reading ability or memory function of underperforming school-children.

These findings are in contradiction to an earlier study run by the same team using the same supplement.

In the second high-quality trial of its kind, published in *PLOS ONE*, the researchers found an entirely different result to an earlier study carried out in 2012, where [omega-3 supplements](#) were found to have a beneficial effect on the reading ability and working memory of school children with learning needs such as ADHD.

In this second study, the researchers tested children who were in the bottom quarter of ability in reading, and found that [fish oil supplements](#) did not have any or very little effect on the children's [reading ability](#) or working memory and behaviours.

The team from the Universities of Birmingham and Oxford tested 376 children aged 7-9 years old, learning to read, but in the bottom quarter in terms of their ability.

Half of the children took a daily Omega-3 [fish](#) oil supplement and the remaining children took a placebo for 16 weeks.

Their reading and working memories were tested before and after by their parents at home and teachers in school—with no real differences found in the outcomes.

Professor Paul Montgomery, University of Birmingham, who led the research said:

"We are all keen to help kids who are struggling at school and in these times of limited resources, my view is that funds should be spent on more promising interventions. The effects here, while good for a few kids, were not substantial for the many."

Dr. Thees Spreckelsen, University of Oxford, Co-Author of the report added:

"Fish oil or Omega-3 fatty acids are widely regarded as beneficial. However, the evidence on benefits for children's learning and behaviour is clearly not as strong as previously thought."

More information: Paul Montgomery et al. Docosahexaenoic acid for reading, working memory and behavior in UK children aged 7-9: A randomized controlled trial for replication (the DOLAB II study), *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0192909](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0192909)

Provided by University of Birmingham

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