

# Fish oil supplements have no effect on anxiety and depression

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Omega-3 fats have little or no effect on anxiety and depression according to new research from the University of East Anglia.

Increased consumption of [omega-3](#) fats is widely promoted globally because of a common belief that it will protect against, or even reverse, conditions such as anxiety and depression.

But a systematic review published today in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, finds that [omega-3 supplements](#) offer no benefit.

Omega-3 is a type of fat. Small amounts are essential for [good health](#) and can be found in the food that we eat including nuts and seeds and [fatty fish](#), such as salmon.

Omega-3 fats are also readily available as over-the-counter supplements and they are widely bought and used.

The research team looked at 31 trials of adults with and without depression or anxiety. More than 41,470 participants were randomized to consume more long-chain omega-3 fats (fish oils), or maintain their usual intake, for at least six months

They found that the supplements had little or no effect in preventing depression or anxiety symptoms.

Lead author Dr. Lee Hooper, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, said: "Our previous research has shown that long-chain omega-3 supplements, including fish oils, do not protect against conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes or death.

"This large systematic review included information from many thousands of people over long periods. Despite all this information, we don't see protective effects.

"The most trustworthy studies consistently showed little or no effect of long-chain omega-3 fats on depression or anxiety, and they should not be

encouraged as a treatment."

Dr. Katherine Deane, from UEA's School of Health Sciences, said "Oily fish can be a very nutritious food as part of a balanced diet.

"But we found that there is no demonstrable value in people taking omega-3 oil supplements for the prevention or treatment of depression and anxiety.

"Considering the [environmental concerns](#) about industrial fishing and the impact it is having on fish stocks and plastic pollution in the oceans, it seems unhelpful to continue to swallow fish oil tablets that give no benefit."

The research was funded by the World Health Organisation.

"Omega-3 and polyunsaturated fat for prevention of depression and [anxiety](#) symptoms: [systematic review](#) and meta-analysis of randomized trials" is published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*.

**More information:** Katherine H. O. Deane et al. Omega-3 and polyunsaturated fat for prevention of depression and anxiety symptoms: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised trials, *The British Journal of Psychiatry* (2019). [DOI: 10.1192/bjp.2019.234](https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2019.234)

Provided by University of East Anglia

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