Medical Xpress

DHA improves memory and cognitive function in older adults

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A study published in the November edition of *Alzheimer's & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association* suggests that taking docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) may improve memory and learning in older adults with mild cognitive impairments. This is promising news for many aging Americans who are searching for options to maintain memory and support overall cognitive health.

The "Memory Improvement with Docosahexaenoic Acid Study" (MIDAS) was a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study to evaluate the effects of DHA—the principle omega-3 fatty acid in the brain—on improving cognitive functions in healthy older adults with age-related cognitive decline. The study found that DHA taken for six months improved memory and learning in healthy, older adults with mild memory complaints.

"The results of this study are very encouraging for those consumers concerned about maintaining memory. We know that lower DHA levels are associated with cognitive decline in healthy elderly and Alzheimer's patients, and higher DHA levels help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease," said Duffy MacKay, N.D., vice president, scientific & regulatory affairs, for the Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN). "Memory loss, dementia and the development of Alzheimer's disease are prominent health concerns for older individuals. The more we learn about the valuable role DHA plays in supporting brain function, the more options aging Americans have towards managing cognitive decline."

These findings underscore the importance of early DHA intervention. While the MIDAS study focused on a population of healthy adults with age-associated memory impairment, a study recently published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*), conducted in a population that had previously been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, did not indicate DHA provided a statistically significant benefit to cognitive function. The lead author of the *JAMA* study also highlighted that their results may have been different had DHA been administered before the participants' disease progressed.

"This study reinforces the principle that consumers will reap the most benefit from their DHA supplements—and many supplements—when they are taken over time and before a health concern is imminent," continued Dr. MacKay. "When included as a part of a proactive health regimen that includes a well-balanced diet, regular physical activity and routine visits with a healthcare professional, dietary supplements offer an important tool to help support many systems in the body, including memory and cognitive function."

The MIDAS study was conducted in a total of 485 subjects, aged 55 and older with a subjective memory complaint and who met criteria for age-related cognitive decline (or "age-associated memory impairment"). Subjects were randomly assigned 900 mg/d of algal DHA orally or a placebo for 24 weeks.

DHA is an omega-3 fatty acid and is available as a dietary supplement. Many Americans turn to dietary supplements each year help manage age-related challenges. According to CRN's Consumer Survey on Dietary Supplements, among Americans aged 55+ who take supplements, 13 percent report they do so for "memory" and 39 percent for "healthy aging."

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Provided by Council for Responsible Nutrition

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