

Keywords:

fish oil (ver1 – 10, ver 2 – 12)

benefits (ver1 – 1, ver 2 – 2)

pregnant (ver1 – 7, ver 2 – 9)

Version 1 – not mentioning new study (475 words)

Could fish oil prevent weight-related health issues in our children?

(suggest picture of non-race-specific pregnant woman with one or more children around her)

We've known about the benefits of including fish oil in your diet while you're pregnant for a long time. Up to one in five New Zealand women currently take fish oil supplements during pregnancy, according to the latest estimate. It's been linked to preventing asthma in babies, as well as supporting nervous system and visual development and reducing allergies. It's also been shown to have positive effects on breast milk production, lowering the risk of preeclampsia and fighting postnatal depression in mothers.

The Liggins Institute thinks there's also a link between fish oil and children's weight issues.

Strong evidence

"I am increasingly seeing children in my clinic with serious weight problems, many of them with complications like diabetes that we used to see only in adults," says Dr Ben Albert, a Research Fellow at the Liggins Institute and a paediatrician at Starship Hospital. He's already led a number of successful animal-based studies looking at whether the omega 3 in fish oil reduces the risk of diabetes and other obesity-related illnesses.

(suggest picture of Dr Albert/his team if available – smiling and looking approachable)

Last year, his team found that fresh fish oil prevented a major diabetes risk factor from developing in the pups of overweight rats. "This is exciting because it raises the question: if overweight women take fresh fish oil in pregnancy, will it lower the risk of their children later developing diabetes?" says Dr Albert.

The team also found supporting evidence that the omega 3 fatty acids in fresh fish oil improves the way insulin works, protecting rat pups against diseases like diabetes.

Are your weight and your child's weight connected?

Children of overweight women have nearly twice the risk of developing problems like diabetes later in life, and at least 3 in 10 pregnant women in New Zealand are overweight. "And we already know that if you carry extra weight while you're pregnant, your child is more likely to develop weight problems and diabetes as they grow up," says Dr Albert. So should expectant mothers be taking fish oil supplements right now?

(suggest picture of oily-looking generic supplement here)

Fresh or supplement?

Interestingly, Dr Albert advises eating fresh fish instead. In an earlier study, his team tested samples of 36 fish oil capsule brands sold in New Zealand and found that most – 83% – were rancid and oxidised beyond international recommended levels. How ‘off’ they were had nothing to do with best-before date, price, or the country they came from.

“Our best advice is for pregnant women is, if you want more omega 3 fats, eat oily fish like salmon, tuna, sardines and anchovies,” he says.

Obviously, the wider challenge – of breaking the intergenerational cycle of weight-related health problems – is tough and needs multiple long-term strategies across our society.

“But improving the health of mothers while they’re pregnant is one really powerful approach,” says Dr Albert, “because the unborn baby’s environment in the womb has lifelong effects on how their bodies work.”

My issue with version 1 is that, by not mentioning the upcoming study, it sounds like eating fresh fish instead of supplements is the ‘final word’ on the subject. And this might make it harder for people to get excited by the idea of a new supplement being tested in the new study. I feel this might be rather shooting Dr Albert in the foot...?

Version 2 – mentioning new study (630 words)

Could fish oil prevent weight-related health issues in our children?

The Liggins Institute thinks so

(suggest picture of non-race-specific pregnant woman with one or more children around her)

We’ve known about the benefits of including fish oil in your diet while you’re pregnant for a long time. Up to one in five New Zealand women currently take fish oil supplements during pregnancy, according to the latest estimate. It’s been linked to preventing asthma in babies, as well as supporting nervous system and visual development and reducing allergies. It’s also been shown to have positive effects on breast milk production, lowering the risk of preeclampsia and fighting postnatal depression in mothers.

Now, new research is testing out whether fish oil can improve the lifelong health of your child.

The upcoming study, by the University of Auckland-based Liggins Institute, investigates whether taking fish oil supplements during pregnancy might help prevent children from developing weight-related problems later in life.

“I am increasingly seeing children in my clinic with serious weight problems, many of them with complications like diabetes that we used to see only in adults,” says Dr Ben Albert, a Research Fellow at the Liggins Institute and a paediatrician at Starship Hospital. “If we could reduce this with a safe, accessible, food-based supplement, it could make a real difference for thousands of families.”

(suggest picture of oily-looking generic supplement here, above the science-y bit)

Strong evidence

Dr Albert has already led a number of successful animal-based studies looking at whether the omega 3 in fish oil reduces the risk of diabetes and other obesity-related illnesses. Last year, his team found that fresh fish oil prevented a major diabetes risk factor from developing in the pups of overweight rats. “This is exciting because it raises the question: if overweight women take fresh fish oil in pregnancy, will it lower the risk of their children later developing diabetes?” says Dr Albert.

(suggest picture of Dr Albert/his team if available – smiling and looking approachable)

The team also found supporting evidence that the omega 3 fatty acids in fresh fish oil improves the way insulin works, protecting rat pups against diseases like diabetes. “Our new study will reveal whether human babies experience the same benefit.”

Are your weight and your child’s weight connected?

Children of overweight women have nearly twice the risk of developing problems like diabetes later in life, and at least three in 10 pregnant women in New Zealand are overweight. “And we already know that if you carry extra weight while you’re pregnant, your child is more likely to develop weight problems and diabetes as they grow up,” says Dr Albert.

(suggest a picture of three smiling mums-to-be – Maori, PI and European – looking less than 16 weeks pregnant)

That’s why his researchers are seeking pregnant women in the upper BMI range to join the clinical trial. The goal is for a third of the 160 participants to be Māori and another third Pacific women. “We know that Māori and Pacific women are affected by weight problems even more than other New Zealanders, so it’s really important they’re part of this study,” says Dr Albert.

Fresh or supplement?

So should expectant mothers be taking fish oil supplements right now? Interestingly, until the results of his research are in, Dr Albert advises eating fresh fish instead. In an earlier study, his team tested samples of 36 fish oil capsule brands sold in New Zealand and found that most – 83% – were rancid and oxidised beyond international recommended levels. How ‘off’ they were had nothing to do with best-before date, price, or the country they came from.

“Our best advice is for pregnant women is, if you want more omega 3 fats, eat oily fish like salmon, tuna, sardines and anchovies. We can assure the women in our study that the fish oil supplements will be fresh,” he says.

Obviously, the wider challenge – of breaking the intergenerational cycle of weight-related health problems – is tough and needs multiple long-term strategies across our society.

“But improving the health of mothers while they’re pregnant is one really powerful approach,” says Dr Albert, “because the unborn baby’s environment in the womb has lifelong effects on how their bodies work.”