

## Safe and Unsafe Sources of Omega-3 Fatty Acids for Mothers

The research on essential fatty acids (EFA's) continues to attest to their complexity and essential role in human health and development. Not only are they shown to support immune function, cardio-vascular health, vision, memory and mood-stabilization, they are essential for optimum fetal growth. Specifically, Omega-3 fatty acids, sources of EPA (Eicosapentanoic Acid) and DHA (Docosahexanoic Acid), are critical for babies both in utero and early infancy because of their role in development of the brain, eyes and nervous system.

Because the body can not manufacture Omega-3's, they must be obtained through diet, and for infants, this means via the mother's breastmilk. It is vitally important that mothers: consume the right amount of omega-3's, the right ratio of Omega-3's (more EPA and less DHA), and that the fatty acids come from a clean source (no heavy metals) . What is the best source of Omega-3's for mothers? Although oils of evening primrose, flaxseed and borage oil are good sources, oil from small oily fish low on the food chain is considered the best source. The news has been rife with reports of both fresh and salt water fish being contaminated with heavy metals and therefore unfit for consumption. These reports are indeed true and should be heeded. Any commercial supplement taken for omega-3's should bare evidence that the oil has been cleaned and purified of heavy metals.

And what fish are considered safe for consumption?

The following is a list of fish considered SAFE for consumption as per The Green Guide:

Anchovy	Blue Crab (mid-Atlantic)	Catfish
Clams	Cod (Pacific, not Atlantic)	Flounder and Sole (Pacific, not Atlantic)
Herring	Oysters, farmed	Pollock (Pacific)
Salmon (Wild Alaskan and Californian)		Sardines
Scallops	Tilapia (Farmed)	Trout (Farmed)

The following is a list of fish considered UNSAFE for consumption as per The Green Guide:

Blue Crab, Gulf of Mexico	Chilean Seabass	Patagonian Toothfish
Cod (Atlantic)	Groupers	Halibut (Atlantic and Pacific)
Lobsters	Mackerel	Mahimahi
Orange Roughy	Oreo Dory	Oysters (Gulf of Mexico)
Pollock (Atlantic)	Shark	Snappers
Striped Bass	Swordfish	Tuna (yellowfin and bluefin)

Fish Oil Supplements During Pregnancy Boost Kids' Hand-Eye Coordination. Whether these benefits last is unknown, one expert says

[http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_42960.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_42960.html) (\*this news item will not be available after 03/21/2007)



# HealthDay

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THURSDAY, Dec. 21 (HealthDay News) -- Toddlers whose mothers took fish oil supplements during pregnancy tended to have better hand-eye coordination than children whose mothers didn't take the supplements, a new study found.

The results of the small study by Australian researchers appear online in the Dec. 21 issue of the Archives of Disease in Childhood.

"Omega-3 fatty acids, commonly referred to as 'fish oil,' are essential nutrients for human health," said Dr. David L. Katz, director of the Prevention Research Center at Yale University School of Medicine. He was not involved in the study.

"Along with essential omega-6 fats, these compounds influence everything from hormonal balance to immune function," Katz said. "Omega-3s are taken up avidly by the developing eyes and brain of a fetus, and are thought to be important contributors to healthy development in early childhood."

Because of concerns about mercury in certain types of fish, fish oil supplements are becoming more popular, the study authors noted.

In the study, by researchers at the University of Western Australia's School of Paediatrics and Child Health, 98 pregnant women were given either 4 grams of fish oil supplements or 4 grams of olive oil supplements each day starting at 20 weeks of pregnancy until their babies were born.

When the children were two-and-a-half years old, their growth and development was tested. The tests included tests for language, behavior, practical reasoning and hand-eye coordination.

Among the 72 children tested, the researchers found no significant differences in language skills and growth between children whose mothers had taken the fish oil supplements and those whose mothers hadn't, the researchers found.

However, children whose mothers had taken fish oil supplements scored significantly higher in hand-eye coordination, compared with children whose mothers had not taken the supplements. This association held true even after the researchers accounted for the mothers' age and length of time they breast-fed.

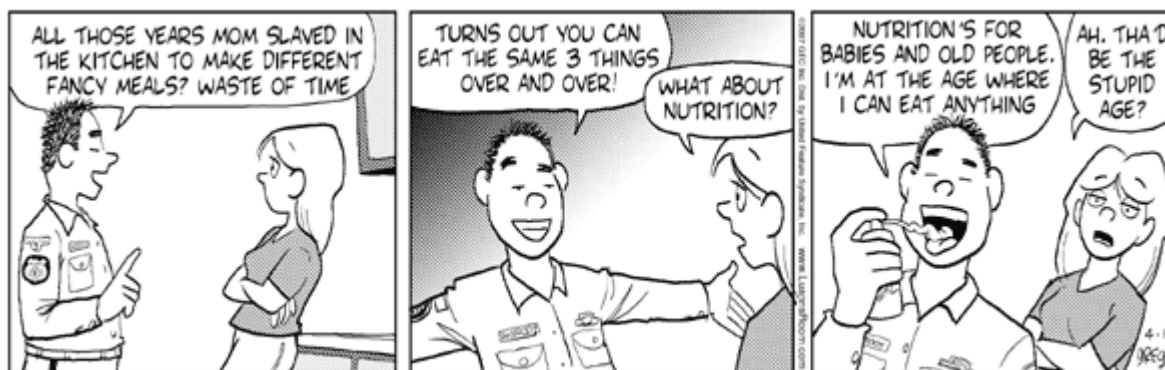
In addition, the researchers found that high levels of omega-3 fatty acids in the babies' umbilical cord blood were significantly linked with good hand-eye coordination, while low levels of omega-6 fatty acids, found in many vegetable oils, were not.

"These preliminary data indicate that supplementation with a relatively high-dose fish oil during the last 20 weeks of pregnancy is not only safe but also seems to have potential beneficial effects that need to be explored further," the authors wrote. "Given the scarcity of data to support the efficacy of fish oil supplementation during pregnancy, our data have a potentially important role in informing on the effects of fish oil supplementation on early postnatal infant development," they concluded.

Katz said: "This study confirms that supplements of fish oil taken by pregnant women can influence the hand-eye coordination of their offspring. Whether that translates into long-term benefits in vision, coordination, or cognition remains to be seen. But the findings certainly hint at the importance of omega-3s to the health of young children."

It will take more research to clarify the optimal dose of omega-3 fatty acids, and the long-term health effects of supplementation during pregnancy, Katz said. "But we know enough already to conclude that fish oil from supplements is generally a good idea, during pregnancy especially. I routinely advise 1 gram, twice daily, of fish oil to my pregnant patients -- and my non-pregnant patients, too."

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