

Fish oil or fish consumption? New recommendations for pregnant women trying to prevent childhood asthma

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Consuming fish during pregnancy offers same protection in preventing childhood asthma as fish oil supplements. Credit: University of South Florida

Pregnant women who consume fish rather than fish oil supplements are just as likely to protect their offspring from developing asthma.

Researchers at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Fla just published a scientific review of two studies that conclude children whose mothers consume high-dose [omega-3 fatty acids](#) daily during the 3rd trimester are less likely to develop such breathing problems.

However, co-authors Richard Lockey, MD, and Chen Hsing Lin, MD suggest pregnant women receive the same benefit following the Food and Drug Administration and Environmental Protection

Agency's recommendation to consume 8-12 ounces (2-3 servings) of low mercury fish a week.

The review published in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology: In Practice* examined two articles. The *New England Journal of Medicine* study included 346 pregnant women in their 3d trimester who took omega-3 fatty acids daily and 349 who took a placebo. The investigators also divided the trial population into three groups based on their blood levels of omega-3 fatty acids. The population with the lowest blood levels benefited the most from [fish oil](#) supplementation.

The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology randomized [pregnant women](#) in their 3rd trimester into fish oil, placebo and "no oil" groups. The fish oil group took omega-3 fatty acids daily as did the placebo (olive oil) group. The "no oil" group was informed of the trial proposal and therefore could consume fish oil or fish during the 3rd trimester if they chose to do so. Researchers found the fish oil and the "no oil" groups took less asthma medication as they aged to 24 years old, inferring both groups developed less asthma.

"Omega-3 fatty acids cannot be synthesized by humans and therefore are essential nutrients which are derived exclusively from marine sources," said Lin. "It may be premature to recommend daily high dose [fish oil supplementation](#) during the 3rd trimester."

"With almost equal to slightly higher cost, consuming 8-12 ounces (2-3 servings) of fish a week not only may attain the same asthma protection, but strengthens the nutritional benefits to infant growth and development," said Lockey.

Provided by University of South Florida

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