

Summary (proof reading)



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Get Hooked on to Seafood Kamahl Cogdon Herald Sun September 19, 2007

12: 00AM AUSTRALIAN children need five times more fish in their diet, an international team of nutrition and health experts says.

They suggest a major dietary shortfall of omega-3 fatty acids is contributing to serious health problems within children. And they have called for federal government dietary guidelines on omega-3 intake to be raised. Fish and seafood are the best sources of long-chain omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA, which are good fats crucial for brain development, central nervous system functioning, eyesight and heart health.

The Scientific Consensus report found that there was also good evidence that omega-3s played a major role in preventing and treating behavioural and learning problems in children, including conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It also found emerging evidence of benefits for asthma and bone health. Report's co-author and Omega-3 Centre Executive Director Wendy Morgan said lack of omega-3s could also be setting up children for major chronic illnesses, particularly heart disease, in adulthood. " What they are eating now is going to influence their risk of a heart attack in later life," she said. " There is a huge amount of evidence looking at the many roles of long chain omega-3s in helping reduce the risk of heart disease."

The report found children aged 14 and over needed 500mg a day of long-chain omega-3s for optimal health. But most children consumed only 34mg to 118mg per day. Ms Morgan, a dietician, said most children were lucky to eat one meal of fish per week, but they needed two or three meals of oily fish, such as salmon, tuna, sardines and herrings, each week to meet the daily 500mg target. Deakin University's Human Nutrition Expert Professor

Andrew Sinclair said the problem was that many children did not like fish.

" The intake of omega-3s in Australian children is very low because most kids these days are such fussy eaters," he said. " They often just dont like fish and certainly steer away from other seafood which are naturally rich in these healthy long-chain omega-3 nutrients. " Parents need to be aware of this current enormous shortfall and find more creative ways to help their children consume more essential omega-3 nutrients." Ms Morgan said many foods were now enriched with omega-3s. These included milk, bread, yogurt, snack bars and even frozen chips. She said that while the amount of omega-3s in these enriched foods was usually small, every little bit helped. Long-chain omega-3s are an essential nutrient taken up by every cell in the body. But they are not produced by the body and must be taken in through diet.

Oily fish are the best sources, but other fish and seafood also contain good amounts. Some meats and eggs contain smaller levels. The EPA and DHA omega-3s in these foods are used most effectively by the body. Less effective short-chain ALA omega-3s are found in plant-derived foods such as canola oil, linseed and walnuts. The report, produced by seven leading nutrition scientists and health experts following an international workshop in April, said guidelines on omega-3 intake were inadequate. The Federal Governments National Health and Medical Research Council recommends children consume between 40mg and 125mg per day of long-chain omega-3s, depending on their age and sex.

But Ms Morgan said these targets were based on how much omega-3s healthy children were already consuming rather than on the level needed for optimal health. The report said the target for children aged 14 and over

should be set at 500mg daily. This level should be adjusted for younger children, based on their body weight.