

Fish and the heart

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Omega 3 fish oils have in some studies been shown to stimulate blood circulation, increases the breakdown of fibrin, a compound involved in clot and scar formation, and may reduce blood pressure slightly. Some evidence indicates that omega fatty acids reduce cholesterol levels, especially triglycerides. Regular intake may help reduce the risk of heart attack.

The American Heart Association recommends the consumption of 1 gram of fish oil daily, preferably by eating fish, for patients with coronary heart disease. Healthy women who said they ate fish five times a week or more had a 45% lower risk of dying of heart disease over the next 16 years than healthy women who ate fish less than once a month, according to the Journal of the American Medical Association. An editorial in the May 15, 2000 issue of the American Journal of Cardiology claimed the time had come to add fish and fish oil supplements to the list of standard treatments of coronary heart disease.

In recent years, cardiologists have regularly prescribed omega 3 supplements to patients post myocardial infarction (heart attack) to reduce triglycerides levels. Triglycerides are a form of cholesterol that contributes to a build-up of fatty substances (plaque) in the blood vessels that leads to clots including heart attacks and strokes. However the effectiveness of triglycerides for preventing clots is still under scrutiny. The HSE recently took omega 3 supplements off the GMS list meaning that Omega 3 is no longer available for free to medical card patients and meaning it is no longer subsidised for private patients under the HSE's Drug Payment Scheme. The reason behind this according to the HSE is a lack of evidence of the effectiveness of omega 3s to prevent clots.

For people who do not eat sufficient fish oils, in Whelehans I recommend a fish oil supplement called MorEPA as it contains the highest level of pure omega 3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA) of any fish oil supplement on the market. For those suffering from joint pain and inflammatory conditions like arthritis, I find that a fish oil supplement called Lyprinol gives relief in many people as it has a more potent anti-inflammatory effects than other fish oils.

Disclaimer: For more specific advice and information on diet and food, you should speak to a dietician or nutritionist. Supplements are not meant as a substitute for a balanced diet.