

Fish oil reduces memory loss: study

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Taking fish oil can give adults starting to suffer 'senior moments' the brain power of someone three years younger, a study claims.

Researchers have found that taking a supplement of omega 3 for six months had a beneficial effect on people with age-related forgetfulness and loss of learning ability.

They tested the affect of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), which is most commonly found in fish oil, on 485 healthy people and found that memory and general brain function increased significantly.

The research, based on volunteers with an average age of 70, showed taking 900mg capsules every day was the equivalent of turning back the clock three years, it was found.

Now it is hoped that further studies could show that the fatty acid could help stave off Alzheimer's disease if new techniques can be found to diagnose it before it take holds.

Dr Karin Yurko-Mauro, at Martek, an American bioscience company that carried out the study and manufactures DHA from algae, said those that took the supplements had "almost double the reduction in errors on a test that measures learning and memory performance".

"The benefit is roughly equivalent to having the learning and memory skills of someone three years younger," he said.

The study was one of two into the affect of DHA presented at the international Alzheimer's Association meeting in Vienna, Austria.

The first found that it did nothing to slow memory declines in people with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease, but the second in healthy people with slight memory complaints did show promise. The second group also showed a "significant decrease" in heart rate.

Taken together, the findings along with other studies suggest treating Alzheimer's must begin early in the disease process, before "plaques and tangles" start clogging up the brain, it was said.

William Thies, PhD, Chief Medical and Scientific Officer at the Alzheimer's Association said it was "too early" to make a recommendation about use of DHA supplements to prevent loss of mental function.

"In high doses, DHA does have side effects, so you would want to see a benefit to justify the risk you are taking," he said. "We need more work for that."

He said for that to happen, early detection and diagnosis of Alzheimer's needs to improve, in order to test therapies at earlier stages of the disease and enable earlier intervention."

DHA is naturally found in the body in small amounts, and is the most abundant omega-3 fatty acid in the brain.

Around 700,000 people in Britain suffer from dementia, more than half of whom have Alzheimer's.

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