

Fish Oil in Pregnancy Treats Depression Risks

Eating omega-3 fatty acids found in seafood such as tuna, herring, salmon and sardines might stave off depression in pregnant women, both before and after childbirth.

The federal government has issued warnings to pregnant women about eating fish due to their potentially harmful levels of mercury, but government recommendations still allow eating up to 12 ounces a week of a variety of species.

In the study, researchers analyzed 11,721 British women. They found that women who consumed greater amounts of omega-3 fatty acids in seafood during the third trimester were less likely to show signs of major depression during pregnancy and for up to eight months after the birth.

Women with the highest intakes of omega-3, who consumed fish two or three times a week, were half as likely to suffer from depression as women with the lowest intakes.

According to researchers, the 12-ounce-a-week government recommendation would allow for two servings of fish per week. Salmon, catfish and scallops reportedly have very little mercury and fish-oil supplements are supposed to be mercury free.

About 10 percent of pregnant women--13 percent to 15 percent among new mothers--develop depression severe enough to interfere with their functioning.

Although studies looking at the risk of antidepressant drugs in pregnant and nursing women have showed low risk, there have been few studies about long-term effects.

The current research shows a strong correlation between low levels of omega-3 fatty acids and symptoms of depression, researchers said. However, further studies are needed to prove that boosting levels of fatty acids will fight depression.

Government warnings have urged pregnant women to avoid eating shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish because they can contain high levels of mercury, which can damage the nervous system of the fetus. Additionally, fish may also pose other contamination risks. Researchers suggested that women follow local recommendations in regard to eating fish.

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