

MEDIA RELEASE

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‘EXCITING’ GERMAN RESEARCH FINDS FISH OIL MAY BENEFIT THE AGING BRAIN

German research has found that a higher intake of fish oil rich in long-chain omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (LC-n3-FA) may benefit the ageing brain. This has significant implications for helping to prevent Alzheimer’s disease and maintaining general cognitive functions in older people.

The double-blind randomised study* took place over a 26-week period, and involved 65 healthy subjects aged 50 – 75 years being given either fish oil (containing 880 and 1220 mg/d of DHA and EPA, respectively) or a placebo. Before and after the intervention period, the participants were given brain scans and blood tests, and also assessed for cognitive performance.

The University of Berlin researchers found that subjects’ executive functions significantly increased after taking Omega-3 compared with a placebo. Executive functions are mental processes that help to connect past experience with present action, and are used for activities such as planning, organising, strategising, paying attention to and remembering details, and managing time and space.

The study also found that the Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly EPA, had beneficial effects on brain structure and health, and decreased diastolic blood pressure and inflammatory indicators TGF- α and IL-6.

Importantly, this study, using the gold standard double-blind randomized study design, also provides first-time evidence that Omega-3 fatty acids have positive effects on brain functions in healthy older adults, and reveals more about the underlying mechanisms involved in helping to improve brain function as one ages.

Alison Quesnel, Executive Director of Natural Products NZ, says that the German study’s findings are important because it utilised extremely robust study design and methodologies.

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Fish oil study / 2

“Fish oil studies abound but this one is particularly exciting because – unlike many of its counterparts – it is rock-solid. It is an important addition to the body of knowledge about natural measures that can be taken to help maintain cognitive functions into old age.”

Ms Quesnel added that, as was the case when taking any type of nutritional supplement, consumers were encouraged to consult with a health professional before starting a course of fish oil, or changing their current regime. People should also be sure to read product labels thoroughly.

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**** Reference***

Witte AV, Kerti L, Hermannstädter HM, Fiebach JB, Schreiber SJ, Schuchardt JP, Hahn A, Flöel A. “Long-Chain Omega-3 Fatty Acids Improve Brain Function and Structure in Older Adults.” *Cerebral Cortex* (E-publication ahead of print June 24, 2013) doi:10.1093/cercor/bht163.

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Natural Products New Zealand (NPNZ) is a national industry organisation representing this country’s natural products, functional foods, complementary medicines, cosmeceuticals and nutraceuticals industries within New Zealand and internationally.

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