

Expert refutes damning fish oil research

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A natural health expert says recent academic research sceptical of fish oil products, has taken too narrow a view.

The research undertaken by two authors from the University of Auckland Medical School, claims there is little evidence for health benefits from fish-oil products.

The pair examined results of 18 randomised control trials and six meta-analyses of trials on fish oil, published between 2005 and 2012.

The research letter published on the study states only two publications reported a real health benefit from fish oils supplements, for the diseases they were looking at. However, Shaun Holt, a doctor, pharmacist and health researcher, says the most obvious deficiency of the University of Auckland's research, is that it has not taken a scientific, or "even reasonable", approach to the papers they included.

"While it is true that the most important research is published in better journals, and the journals selected are some of the best, it is a huge source of bias and potential error to only include papers from a select few journals, and then imply this represents the whole of the medical literature," Dr Holt says.

He says an example of how this approach failed, is that they included a negative study on depression because it was published in JAMA. However, they excluded a study on depression published in the Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry, which found that omega-3 is effective in major depression.

Furthermore, Dr Holt says of the 24 papers included, a number were for conditions that omega-3 is not widely recommended for. This includes cancer and Crohn's disease.

"As the authors state, omega-3 supplements are most commonly for heart health, or to lower cholesterol - yet their analysis did not include a single study looking at the effects of omega-3 on cholesterol or blood pressure," he says.

The research also excluded studies on the use of omega-3 for osteoarthritis and other forms of arthritis, which Dr Holt says, are one of the main reasons omega-3 is taken.

He says this is supported by strong evidence, and advocated by organisations such as Arthritis Research UK.