

DHA supplementation During Pregnancy

New research reaffirms that DHA supplementation during pregnancy improves cognitive function in infants and children. A study published this month in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition showed that infants born to mothers who consumed DHA from fish oil (300 mg/day) demonstrated better problem solving abilities than those who consumed a corn oil placebo¹. This data supports earlier work published in 2003 that showed children born to mothers who supplemented with 2 tsp Cod Liver Oil daily during pregnancy and lactation had higher IQs at age four when compared to children of mothers who consumed placebo².

Maternal DHA intake during pregnancy is far below the currently recommended amount³ (minimum of 300 mg/day), which may be contributing to the unprecedented incidence of neurological and behavioural problems that face children today.

During the last trimester of pregnancy, mothers selectively transfer DHA to the foetus to support the growth of the brain, eyes, and nervous system. Without sufficient intake, mothers become depleted of DHA and increase their risk of suffering major depressive symptoms in the postpartum period. In fact, population studies have shown that lower intakes of DHA are associated with higher rates of postpartum depression⁴. It is well established that the essential fatty acid, DHA, is a critical component to a healthy pregnancy. However, a

recent survey of expecting mothers showed that in 68% of the women surveyed, their doctor never mentioned DHA, and half of the women surveyed had never heard of it⁵

¹ Judge MP et al, Maternal consumption of a docosahexaenoic acid-containing functional food during pregnancy: benefit for infant performance on problemsolving

but not on recognition memory tasks at age 9 mo. *Am J Clin Nutr* 2007;85:1572-1577.

² Holland IB, Maternal supplementation with very-long-chain n-3 fatty acids during pregnancy and lactation augments children's IQ at 4 years of age. *Paediatrics* 2003; 111:39-44.

³ Judge MP et al, Dietary DHA intake in pregnant women. *Am Diet Assoc* 2003;103 A-82.

⁴ Hibbeln JR. Seafood consumption, the DHA content of mothers' milk, and prevalence rates of postpartum depression: a cross-national, ecological analysis. *J Affect Disord* 2002;69:15-29.

⁵ The Kelton Study sponsored by the Society for Women's Health Research located in Washington DC. www.womenshealthresearch.org.