

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

February 4, 2018

“Fish Oil Offers No Benefits for Heart Disease”

Advertisers have claimed for years that fish oil (omega-3) improve heart health because they allegedly increase "good" HDL cholesterol. Also, we were warned of the dangers of saturated fats, which are solid at room temperature. They can be found in butter, lard, cheese and cream, as well as the fatty white areas on cuts of meat. Whereas unsaturated fats are liquid at room temperature, such as those seen in vegetable cooking oil or olive oil. In 2014, researchers found that neither effect seemed to make much difference for overall cardiac risk. In short, fish oil supplements do not protect your heart. Shockingly, saturated fats carried about the same cardiac risk as unsaturated fats, omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. People who took fish oil capsules appeared to not be getting the heart-health benefits they desired. Sadly, both studies found the omega-3 fatty acids in fish oil supplements did not provide any significant protection against heart disease. A new 2018 vast analysis of 10 large randomized trials has revealed that taking omega-3 fish oil supplements was not associated with a significantly reduced risk of 1) death from coronary heart disease, 2) nonfatal myocardial infarction (heart attack), 3) any coronary heart disease events and 4) major vascular events. Somehow, omega-3 fatty acids have gotten a heart-healthy reputation without good evidence that they actually prevent major cardiovascular disease events. Further, benefits also weren't seen in subgroups with prior coronary heart disease, diabetes, elevated lipid levels, or statin use. Still, the American Heart Association (AHA) has recommended use as “reasonable” for secondary prevention of coronary heart disease in patients with recent events and "might also be considered" in people with heart failure and reduced ejection fraction. To the contrary, the European Society of Cardiology has called a protective effect of omega-3s “debatable at best.” There is agreement that people should get their omega-3 fatty acids and fish oil from food rather than through supplements. Consumers should remember that taking fish oils, fish liver oils, and omega 3 supplements may pose a risk for some people. Omega-3 supplements may affect blood clotting and trigger gastrointestinal problems. Also, consuming high levels of oily fish increases the ingestion of high levels of toxic mercury. The AHA recommend shrimp, light canned tuna, salmon, pollock and catfish as being low in mercury. They advise avoiding shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish, as these can be high in mercury. New research reveals that males with high blood concentrations of omega-3 fatty acids are at a much higher risk of developing prostate cancer. Please check out my book, “*Fish oils (omega-3 fatty acids): Facts, Fantasies and Failures*” available at amazon.com.

In the America that I love, always rely on the scientific facts.

Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

Surgeon/Scientist/Patient Advocate

27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444

985-229-6955 Home | 985-229-3760 – Fax | 985-514-0578 – Cell

rhowesmd@hughes.net | www.iwillfindthecure.org

