

Differences in Omega-3 Compounds Affect Brain Skills



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A growing body of scientific evidence suggests a wide range of potential health effects of omega-3 fatty acids supplementation – ranging from cardiovascular to immune system benefits. Scientists are now focusing attention towards identifying the specific compounds present in omega-3s, to ascertain their respective potential health benefits. Isabelle Bauer, from Swinburne University (Australia), and colleagues enrolled 13 men and women, average age 24 years, in a study in which participants were randomly assigned to first receive 30 days of supplementation with an dietary supplement rich in eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), or a supplement rich in docosahexaenoic acid (DHA); followed by a 30-day washout period; and a crossover period to the other intervention. Brain activity was measured via fMRI while the subjects completed a standardized cognitive assessment. The team observed that EPA improved cognitive performance while reducing neural activity, whereas the DHA-rich supplement appeared to be less effective in enhancing neurocognitive functioning. The study authors report that: “following the [eicosapentaenoic acid]-rich supplementation, participants' brains worked ‘less hard’ and achieved a better cognitive performance than prior to supplementation. Conversely, the increase in functional activation and lack of improvement in time or accuracy of cognitive performance following [docosahexaenoic acid]-rich supplementation may indicate that [docosahexaenoic acid]-rich supplementation is less effective than [eicosapentaenoic acid]-rich supplementation in enhancing neurocognitive functioning .”

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Isabelle Bauer, Matthew Hughes, Renee Rowsell, Robyn Cockerell, Andrew Pipingas, Sheila Crewther, David Crewther. "Omega-3 supplementation improves cognition and modifies brain activation in young adults." Human Psychopharmacology: Clinical and Experimental, 28 Jan. 2014.

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