Do Omega-3/6 Fatty Acids Have a Therapeutic Role in Children and Young People with ADHD?

E. Derbyshire

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Abstract

Background. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a debilitating behavioural disorder affecting daily ability to function, learn, and interact with peers. This publication assesses the role of omega-3/6 fatty acids in the treatment and management of ADHD.

Methods. A systematic review of 16 randomised controlled trials was undertaken. Trials included a total of 1,514 children and young people with ADHD who were allocated to take an omega-3/6 intervention, or a placebo.

Results. Of the studies identified, 13 reported favourable benefits on ADHD symptoms including improvements in hyperactivity, impulsivity, attention, visual learning, word reading, and working/short-term memory. Four studies used supplements containing a 9:3:1 ratio of eicosapentaenoic acid : docosahexaenoic acid : gamma linolenic acid which appeared effective at improving erythrocyte levels. Supplementation with this ratio of fatty acids also showed promise as an adjunctive therapy to traditional medications, lowering the dose and improving the compliance with medications such as methylphenidate.

Conclusion. ADHD is a frequent and debilitating childhood condition. Given disparaging feelings towards psychostimulant medications, omega-3/6 fatty acids offer great promise as a suitable adjunctive therapy for ADHD.