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### **Boosting mental performance**

A particular fish oil (omega-3) supplement has been shown to improve blood flow to the brain during mental activity and to impact on certain aspects of mental performance in young adults, according to research from Northumbria University.

In the first of two studies due to be published in this month's edition of *British Journal of Nutrition*, researchers found that taking either of two different types of fish oil supplement for three months showed reduced mental fatigue and faster reaction times in 18 to 35 year olds however it showed no consistent overall impact on mental function. Contrary to popular belief, these results, suggest that taking omega-3 or fish oil supplements may not have an immediate or measureable impact on mental performance in healthy children and young adults, possibly due to the fact that these populations are already performing at their mental peak or that higher doses or longer than 12 weeks of supplementation are required

Interestingly in the second of these studies it was found that taking DHA-rich fish oil over the same time period did increase blood flow to active areas of the brain during performance of similar mental tasks. The researchers claim these interesting findings could have implications for mental function later on in life, as evidence suggests regularly eating oily fish or taking omega-3 supplements may prevent cognitive decline and dementia, and increased blood flow to the brain may be a mechanism by which this occurs. As these results suggest benefits may be seen with longer term supplementation in older age groups the researchers now plan to investigate this on people between the ages of 50 and 70 to assess the impact of a fish oil supplement on their memory, mental performance and blood flow to the brain.

Lead researcher Dr Philippa Jackson said: "If we can pinpoint both the behavioural and brain blood flow effects of this fatty acid in older healthy people, then the benefits for those with mental degenerative conditions associated with normal aging could be that much greater."

Researchers are hoping to recruit more people to take part in the study to investigate the effects of DHA in older people.

They are keen to hear from individuals who are generally healthy, living in or near the Newcastle area who feel their memory is not as good as it used to be – and who don't currently eat oily fish on a regular basis or take omega-3 supplements.

Participants will be asked to take a DHA-rich supplement for six months, for which they will receive £50 and a 12 month supply of the supplement.

People interested in taking part in the study should contact Dr Jackson on (0191) 204 8818 or email [bpnrc@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:bpnrc@northumbria.ac.uk)

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