

Omega 3 for Preterm Birth Prevention

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إذا احتجت إلى هذه النشرة بلغة أخرى، أو بتنسيق
يسهل الوصول إليه، يرجى التحدث إلى أحد الموظفين لترتيب ذلك لك.

What is Omega 3?

Omega 3 is a fatty acid that occurs naturally in foods including fish, eggs and nuts.

Why is Omega 3 important for women with a history of preterm birth?

Research published in November 2018, found that Omega 3 supplements can help you have a full-term pregnancy. The supplements also help babies grow to a healthy weight in the womb.

You have been identified as someone who has a higher risk of preterm birth, and so a supplement to prevent preterm birth could be especially helpful in your pregnancy.

What does the research say I should do?

If you are pregnant with one baby, take omega 3 supplements each day starting from around 12 weeks of pregnancy onwards.

- Look for the omega 3s called docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA)
- You will need to take at least 500mg of omega 3 per day.
- You do not need to take more than 1,000mg of omega 3 per day. Taking more will not give you or your baby any extra benefit.
- Once you have had your baby you can stop taking omega 3 supplements.

Can I get the recommended amount of omega 3 fats from foods?

It is difficult to get the recommended amount of omega 3s from food alone, unless you regularly eat fatty fish e.g. salmon, sardines or mackerel. If you don't eat fish omega 3 can be found in flaxseed, chia seeds, walnuts, rapeseed, and soya beans.

To get the recommended amount of DHA from salmon, you would need to eat at least 2 large servings (150g) of salmon every week or 3 smaller servings (100g) of salmon every week.

Is there mercury, or any other contaminants in omega 3 supplements?

The amount of mercury in fish and fish oils depends on the type of fish and the process used to extract the omega 3s from the fish. While most oils are processed in a way that removes contaminants, it is recommended to check that your omega 3 supplement is low in mercury and other contaminants.

Are there any side effects of taking omega 3 supplements during pregnancy?

Some women may experience fishy burps, as a result of taking fish oil supplements. Taking your fish oil supplements with food may help prevent fishy burps.

If you encounter any other side effects, you should seek medical advice from a health professional.

Omega 3 supplements possibly increase the risk of needing an induction for pregnancies lasting over 42 weeks. This is much less of a problem for you and your baby, than a very preterm birth.

What if I am already taking a pregnancy multivitamin?

If you are already taking a multivitamin supplement, you should check the label to find out how much DHA and EPA the supplement contains. Most multivitamin supplements do not contain enough omega 3s to reach the amounts recommended to prevent a premature birth. You will need to take an omega 3 supplement in addition to your multivitamin, to get the 500mg of DHA per day.

Importantly, Healthy Start vitamins do not contain omega 3 at the moment.

Is omega 3 licensed for pregnancy?

Most medicines used in the UK have a licence that says exactly how the medicine should be used. There are currently no omega 3 supplements with licences for use in pregnancy.

To get a licence, the drug company must prove that the medicine works and that it is safe to use, by testing it during clinical trials. Trials are almost always done with non-pregnant adults first.

The research showing a benefit of omega 3 in pregnancy is new (November 2018). The omega 3 medications currently available in the UK are not exactly the same formulations as those used in the research studies. However, they do have the same active ingredients.

Over 5200 pregnant women took part in the research studies showing a benefit in reducing the risk of preterm birth. A large analysis of these studies showed the only negative effect to be an increase in prolonged pregnancy (more than 42 weeks of pregnancy).

Therefore, as a preterm birth prevention team we feel that the omega 3 supplements that we are recommending will be of benefit to your pregnancy.

Where can I find out more?

On the Cochrane website: <https://www.cochrane.org/news/new-research-finds-omega-3-fatty-acids-reduce-risk-premature-birth>

On the SAHMRI website: <https://www.sahmriresearch.org/our-research/themes/healthy-mothers-babies-children/research-list/omega3>



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