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FROM ABSTRACT:

Objective: The purpose of this study was to determine the efficacy and safety of omega-3 fatty acids for children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

Methods: This was an open-label pilot study. Ten children aged 4–7 years old with ASD according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition (DSM-IV), were given 1 gram daily of omega-3 fatty acids for 12 weeks. The main outcome measure used was the Autism Treatment Evaluation Checklist.

Results: Of the 9 subjects who completed the study, 8 showed improvement of about 33% on the Autism Treatment Evaluation Checklist (ATEC). None worsened and no side effects were reported.

Conclusions: Omega-3 fatty acids appear to be safe and might be helpful for children suffering from ASD.

THESE AUTHORS ALSO NOTE:

“Omega-3 fatty acids are essential constituents of cell membranes including those in brain nerve cells and are critical in neurodevelopment and in other aspects of the biological basis of behavior.”

Dietary changes in free fatty acids have a marked effect in days or weeks on lipid content of the brain and might be related to mental disorders.

Prior studies have shown improvement in autistic anxiety and agitation with omega-3 fatty acid supplementation.

These autistic children were given supplements containing 380mg of eicosapentaenoic acid and 180mg of docosahexaenoic acid per day for 12 months.

RESULTS

“Eight of the 9 subjects that completed the study period showed improvement.”

“The improvement from baseline to 12 weeks averaged 33% according to ATEC. Most of the improvement was in the first 6 weeks.”
“One child did not respond at all; none worsened.”

“One subject stopped taking the omega-3 fatty acids after 6 weeks, and his clinical state deteriorated; after renewing treatment, he improved again.”

KEY POINTS FROM DAN MURPHY

1) “Omega-3 fatty acids are essential constituents of cell membranes including those in brain nerve cells and are critical in neurodevelopment and in other aspects of the biological basis of behavior.”

2) Prior studies have shown improvement in autistic anxiety and agitation with omega-3 fatty acid supplementation.

3) In this study, 9 autistic children aged 4–7 years old with autistic spectrum disorder were given supplements containing 380mg of eicosapentaenoic acid and 180mg of docosahexaenoic acid (omega-3s) per day for 12 months. [This is a total EPA + DHA of 560mg per day; this is a light amount, as some studies use 10,000 mg / day]

4) 8/9 (89%) showed improvement of about 33%, and this improvement was usually documented within 6 weeks.

5) No children were worse with omega-3 supplementation.

6) There were no side effects from omega-3 supplementation.

7) “One subject stopped taking the omega-3 fatty acids after 6 weeks, and his clinical state deteriorated; after renewing treatment, he improved again.”

8) “Conclusions: Omega-3 fatty acids appear to be safe and might be helpful for children suffering from autistic spectrum disorder.”

COMMENT FROM DAN MURPHY

In children with autistic spectrum disorder, supplementation with a low quantity of omega-3 essential fatty acids showed improvement grades of 33% in 89% of the children within 6 weeks with no side effects and no one becoming worse. Perhaps all autistic children should consider omega-3 supplementation.