

Fish Oil Facts in a Sea of Studies

This week the American Heart Association wrapped up its annual Scientific Sessions meeting – a conference that gathers leading cardiovascular clinicians, scientists, and researchers to learn, present and discuss all things heart. Two of the largest studies presented at this year’s conference focused on fish oil, and the results were mixed.

One study found that a higher amount of prescription fish oil dramatically reduced heart problems and heart-related deaths among people who have high triglycerides (a type of fat in the blood) or other risk factors for heart disease.

The second fish oil study, however, found that over-the-counter fish oil supplements taken by healthy people didn’t prevent or reduce heart problems or heart related mortality. Dr. Sudhir Mungee is an interventional cardiologist with OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute. He says the fats in fish (EPA & DHA) are certainly heart healthy, but you may be best served by serving up the real thing – swordfish over supplements.

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Dr. Sudhir Mungee, OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute Cardiologist

“Eating fish is healthy. We all know that now, because of the EPA. But the dose that you buy the medication for may not be what you are targeting for. If you are doing that to prevent heart disease, that 250 milligram dose is not enough. I would rather put that money into a good diet, rather than buying more medications.” (:19)

Studies like the fish oil trials can be difficult to digest for the average patient. In this age of information, it can be hard to navigate all of the resources available with a click of a mouse or a swipe of a smart phone. Dr. Mungee encourages patients to do their research, but says before basing major health decisions on the latest study available, they should speak with their physician.

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Dr. Sudhir Mungee, OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute Cardiologist

“An educated patient is our best customer. It’s actually nice sometimes, you know most of the time we learn from our patients to what’s going out there. I think the trick is to get this information and talk to your doctor about it. Have a dialogue saying, ‘is this good for me or not?’” (:18)

Dr. Mungee says within the last decade he has seen the risk of heart disease deaths decline 27 to 29 percent in the general population, and new research and studies are a big reason behind that. However, he says when it comes to heart disease, the core prevention measures remain the same: don’t smoke, eat a heart-healthy diet and get plenty of exercise. He says making heart healthy choices can take dedication, but it’s possible with determination and willingness to change.

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Dr. Sudhir Mungee, OSF HealthCare Cardiovascular Institute Cardiologist

“The crucial letter in the word habit is i. You got to change. I got to change. You can’t just say, ‘I don’t exercise, I can’t change this. I have to smoke. I cannot control my diet.’ You want to change the habit, the one letter to change is the letter i.” (:20)

To start that conversation, or to take a free Heart Health Profiler to calculate your risk of developing heart disease, visit OSF HealthCare dot org.