

## Omega 3 for women attending the preterm birth prevention clinic

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### What is Omega 3?

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

### Why is it important for women attending the preterm birth prevention clinic?

Research published in November 2018 found that Omega 3 supplements can help you have a full length pregnancy. The supplements also help babies to growth 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.

- Take at least 500mg of DHA per day.
  - This is two tablets of 'Omacor' supplements prescribed by the hospital
- You do not need to take more than 1000mg of DHA plus EPA 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-3s.
- Continue with your normal pregnancy vitamins too, so long as they do not contain omega 3

\*DHA stands for docosahexaenoic acid and EPA stands for eicosapentaenoic acid

### How much will this help?

Your doctor will be able to discuss this more fully with you. Omega 3 will not prevent all preterm births.

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

It is difficult to get the recommended amount of the omega-3s docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) from food alone, unless you regularly eat fatty fish e.g. salmon, sardines or mackerel.

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.

### 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 probably increase the risk of needing an induction for a prolonged pregnancy (over 42 weeks of pregnancy). This is much less of a problem for yourself and your baby than a very preterm birth.

### **What if I'm 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. If your pregnancy supplement does contain omega 3 it is normally as a separate tablet.

Most multivitamin supplements do not contain enough omega-3s to reach the amounts recommended to prevent premature birth and you will need to take an omega-3 supplement in addition, to get the 500mg of DHA per day.

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

We recommend continuing with a pregnancy multivitamin that does not contain omega 3, and taking the prescribed omega 3 supplement as well.

### **Is omega 3 licenced 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. These trials have shown the omega 3 supplements are safe in non-pregnant adults. The drug companies have not tested whether or not omega 3 is safe in pregnancy.

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>

This leaflet can be made available in difference formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at [pals@lwh.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@lwh.nhs.uk)

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Reference: Mat\_2019-227-v2  
Issue Date: 03/2019  
Review Date: 01/2026