

Omega-3s for postpartum depression?

SEAFOOD.COM NEWS [seafoodnews.com] - April 13, 2011 - Omega-3 fatty acids, found in fish like salmon, may play a critical role in both development and maintenance of the brain and nerves.

Experts recommend that pregnant women and infants get these compounds from their diet, although they can be synthesized in the body.

A new study looks at how omega-3 fatty acids consumed during pregnancy impact both maternal and infant health, specifically postpartum depression. In recent research, Dr. Michelle Price Judge, a faculty member at the University of Connecticut School of Nursing, showed that maternal consumption of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), a prominent omega-3 fatty acid, during pregnancy gives infants a developmental advantage up to 9 months after they're born.

Postpartum depression is a condition that leads to many problems including interruptions in maternal-infant attachment and subsequent impairments in later infant development.

Dr. Judge conducted a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled dietary intervention trial in which 52 pregnant women took either a placebo or a fish oil capsule containing 300 milligrams of DHA five days every week from 24-40 weeks of pregnancy. Dr. Judge was able to categorize postpartum women as having negligible depressive symptoms, significant symptoms of postpartum depression, or being 'positive' for this condition.

Although the study did not have enough women to investigate if fish oil consumption resulted in a lower incidence of diagnosable postpartum depression, women in the treatment group had significantly lower total Postpartum Depression Screening Scale scores, with significantly fewer symptoms common to postpartum depression. For example, compared to those in the control group, women in the fish oil group were less likely to report symptoms related to anxiety and loss of self.

'DHA consumption during pregnancy -- at levels that are reasonably attained from foods -- has the potential to decrease symptoms of postpartum depression,' Dr. Judge and colleagues were quoted as saying.

Why is this important? For starters, some experts estimate that postpartum depression affects 25 percent of new mothers. Also, healthcare providers agree that this condition can have devastating consequences, not only for the women experiencing it but also for their children and family.