

## Moms' seafood intake powerfully affects children's outcomes

A diet high in seafood is strongly linked to better neurological outcomes in children, according to a large-scale British study recently published in *The Lancet*.

A great deal of controversy currently surrounds the issue of seafood consumption during pregnancy, because fish is often high in mercury—a potent neurotoxin that can alter early brain development. Because of this, the U.S. government recommends that pregnant women limit consumption of seafood to 12 ounces per week. However, seafood is a major source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential for early brain development. Many experts believe the modern Western diet contains far too little of these nutrients.

To determine if seafood's benefits outweigh its risks, Joseph Hibbeln and colleagues analyzed information from nearly 9,000 British families participating in the "Children of the 90s" project conducted by the University of Bristol. Included were data on pregnant women's fish consumption and the behavior and development of their children up to age 8. In evaluating the data, the researchers controlled for 28 factors, including socioeconomic status and breastfeeding, which could influence their findings.

Hibbeln and colleagues report that mothers who ate more seafood than current U.S. guidelines recommend had children who were more advanced in motor, communication, and social skills as toddlers; exhibited better social behaviors; and were less likely to have low verbal IQ scores at the age of 8. Conversely, the children of mothers who ate no fish at all were more likely to have poor communication skills at 18 months; to have poor fine motor skills at age 3; to have poor social behavior at age 7; and to have relatively low verbal IQs at age 8, when compared to children of mothers who exceeded the guidelines for seafood consumption.

The researchers conclude, "Maternal seafood consumption of less than 340 grams [12 ounces] per week in pregnancy did not protect children from adverse outcomes; rather, we recorded beneficial effects on child development with maternal seafood intakes of more than 340 grams per week, suggesting that advice to limit seafood consumption could actually be detrimental."

The current report is one of many linking increased intake of omega-3 fatty acids to improved child behavior and cognition (see related articles, [Crime Times, 2006, Vol. 12, No. 4, Page 7](#) and [Crime Times, 2006, Vol. 12, No. 1, Page 1](#)).

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"Maternal seafood consumption in pregnancy and neurodevelopmental outcomes in childhood (ALSPAC study): an observational cohort study," J. R. Hibbeln, J. M. Davis, C. Steer, P. Emmett, I. Rogers, C. Williams, and J. Golding, *The Lancet*, Vol. 369, No. 9561, February 17, 2007, 578-85. Address: [jhibbeln@mail.nih.gov](mailto:jhibbeln@mail.nih.gov).

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"Research shows that the benefits of eating seafood during pregnancy outweigh the risks," news release, Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (Children of the 90s), February 16, 2007.