

## Information about changes to medicines or treatments on the Health Service: **Changes to omega-3 fatty acids prescribing**

The Health Service is asking doctors to stop or greatly reduce the prescribing of some treatments on prescription. This is because the treatments are:

- Not as safe as other treatments OR
- Not as good (effective) as other treatments OR
- More expensive than other treatments that do the same thing.

**This includes omega-3 fatty acids.**

This document will explain why the changes are happening and where you can get more information and support.

### **What are omega-3 fatty acids?**

Omega-3 fatty acids are important fats we need to get from our diet, as the body cannot make them from other fats we eat. Oily fish, such as salmon and mackerel contain high amounts of omega-3 fatty acids.

Omega-3 fats in our diet are likely to have some positive health benefits, including reducing the risk of heart disease.

### **Why will omega-3 fatty acids not be prescribed anymore?**

Although we know that omega-3 fatty acids from our diet have benefits, taking omega-3 fatty acids as prescribed supplements or medicines is not advised for most people. **There is no evidence** that omega-3 fatty acid supplements or medicines help to prevent heart disease.

There is also **no good evidence** that omega-3 fatty acids supplements help in other conditions such as autism or multiple sclerosis.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) says that omega-3 fatty acid supplements or medicines **should not be offered to:**

- People who have had a heart attack more than 3 months ago, to reduce the risk of a further heart attack
- People with diabetes, kidney disease or at risk of heart disease
- Most people with high triglycerides (a fatty substance in the blood)
- Most people with a family history of high cholesterol
- People with liver disease
- Children and young people with autism to manage sleep problems
- People with multiple sclerosis.

### **What can I do if I still want to take omega-3 fatty acids?**

You should try to increase the amount of omega-3 fatty acids in your diet. The British Dietetic Association provides advice on how to do this (see below).

If you have had a heart attack you should eat two to four portions of oily fish, such as salmon, tuna or mackerel, each week.

If you find it difficult to increase the amount of omega-3 in your diet, supplements can be bought over-the-counter from a pharmacy (chemist), supermarket or health food shop.

### **Where can I find more information and support?**

- You can speak to your local pharmacist, GP or the person who prescribed the medication to you
- British Dietetic Association:  
[www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/omega3.pdf](http://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/omega3.pdf)
- The NICE information for patients can be found at:
  - [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg181/ifp/chapter/About-this-information](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg181/ifp/chapter/About-this-information)
  - [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg172/ifp/chapter/About-this-information](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg172/ifp/chapter/About-this-information)
- The Patient and Client Council can also offer support and advice:  
<http://www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net/> or call 0800 917 0222.