

## **Omega-3 fatty acids (fish oil) as an anti-inflammatory: an alternative to nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs for discogenic pain.**

**Background:** The use of NSAID medications is a well-established effective therapy for both acute and chronic nonspecific neck and back pain. *Extreme complications, including gastric ulcers, bleeding, myocardial infarction, and even deaths, are associated with their use.* An alternative treatment with fewer side effects that also reduces the inflammatory response and thereby reduces pain is believed to be omega-3 EFAs found in fish oil. We report our experience in a neurosurgical practice using fish oil supplements for pain relief.

**Methods:** From March to June 2004, 250 patients who had been seen by a neurosurgeon and were found to have nonsurgical neck or back pain were asked to take a total of 1200 mg per day of omega-3 EFAs (eicosapentaenoic acid and decosahexaenoic acid) found in fish oil supplements. A questionnaire was sent approximately 1 month after starting the supplement.

**Results:** Of the 250 patients, 125 returned the questionnaire at an average of 75 days on fish oil. Seventy-eight percent were taking 1200 mg and 22% were taking 2400 mg of EFAs. Fifty-nine percent discontinued to take their prescription NSAID medications for pain. Sixty percent stated that their overall pain was improved, and 60% stated that their joint pain had improved. Eighty percent stated they were satisfied with their improvement, and 88% stated they would continue to take the fish oil. There were no significant side effects reported.

**Conclusions:** *Our results mirror other controlled studies that compared ibuprofen and omega-3 EFAs demonstrating equivalent effect in reducing arthritic pain. Omega-3 EFA fish oil supplements appear to be a safer alternative to NSAIDs for treatment of nonsurgical neck or back pain in this selective group.*

Maroon, J. C. and J. W. Bost (2006). "Omega-3 fatty acids (fish oil) as an anti-inflammatory: an alternative to nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs for discogenic pain." Surg Neurol 65(4): 326-31.