

Cod liver oil supplements should not be prescribed on the NHS. Patients should be advised to increase their dietary intake of omega-3 fatty acids where appropriate by eating two portions of fish a week.

Introduction

Key points about fish oils

- The omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oils are important for good health and cannot be synthesized in the body – they must be obtained from the diet.
- Studies have looked at the possible benefits in people with heart disease and high cholesterol, but the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) have advised that there is no evidence that omega-3 fatty acid compounds help to prevent cardiovascular disease.
- There is no good quality data for the use of omega-3 fatty acid compounds in the prevention of dementia, pre-menstrual syndrome, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), atrial fibrillation, eczema, osteoarthritis or age-related macular degeneration.
- Fish oil supplements are not suitable for everyone, and can be potentially harmful to pregnant women.

Prescribing Guidance

- Cod Liver Oil capsules, liquid, and Cod Liver Oil with Malt Extract are listed under Part XVIII A of the Drug Tariff which is titled – Drugs, Medicines and Other Substances **not** to be ordered under a General Medical Services Contract. These are not licensed medicines, but food supplements.
- This is a treatment where there is insufficient evidence of clinical benefit or cost-effectiveness and therefore it is inappropriate to direct NHS resources towards products that do not have proven efficacy or safety in preference to licensed medicines.
- Patients should be advised to eat two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily, such as fresh tuna, mackerel or herring. Following a heart attack, consumption of two to four portions of oily fish per week is advised.
- A patient leaflet can be downloaded from the British Dietetic Association website giving advice on dietary sources. <https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/omega3.pdf>

References

1. Prescqiipp Bulletin 107. August 2015. The prescribing of vitamins and minerals including vitamin B preparations (DROP-List). <https://www.prescqiipp.info/-vitamins-and-minerals/send/212-vitamins-and-minerals-drop-list/2104-bulletin-107-vitamins-and-minerals-drop-list>
2. Prescqiipp Bulletin 47. October 2013. Omega-3 fatty acids. <https://www.prescqiipp.info/-omega-3-fatty-acids/send/85-omega-3-fatty-acids/787-bulletin-47-omega-3-fatty-acids>
3. The Association of UK Dietitians (BDA). Food Fact Sheet: Omega-3. V5. Review date September 2017. <https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/omega3.pdf>
4. NHS choices. Supplements: Who needs them? A Behind the Headlines report. June 2011. http://www.nhs.uk/news/2011/05may/documents/BtH_supplements.pdf
5. The March 2017 Electronic Drug Tariff. <http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/PrescriptionServices/4940.aspx>
6. Cardiovascular disease: risk assessment and reduction, including lipid modification. NICE CG181. Last updated September 2016. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg181/chapter/1-Recommendations#lipid-modification-therapy-for-the-primary-and-secondary-prevention-of-cvd-2>