

Fish oils do not prevent heart attack or strokes in people with diabetes

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Fish oil supplements do not prevent heart attacks or strokes in patients with diabetes, according to late breaking results from the ASCEND trial presented today in a Hot Line Session at ESC Congress 2018 and published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

In observational studies, higher consumption of [fish](#) is associated with lower risks of coronary artery disease and stroke. However, previous randomised trials have not been able to show that taking fish oil supplements containing omega-3 fatty acids reduce the [risk](#) of having [cardiovascular events](#).

The ASCEND trial (A Study of Cardiovascular Events in Diabetes)² examined whether fish oil supplements reduce the risk of a cardiovascular event in patients with diabetes. Between 2005 and 2011, 15,480 patients with diabetes but no history of cardiovascular disease were randomly assigned to fish oil supplementation (1 g daily) or matching placebo.

The primary efficacy outcome was first serious

vascular event, which included non-fatal heart attacks, non-fatal strokes or transient ischaemic attacks (sometimes called "mini-strokes"), or deaths from a cardiovascular cause (but excluding any intracranial haemorrhage; i.e. bleeding in the head or brain³).

During an average of 7.4 years of follow-up, a first serious vascular event occurred in 689 (8.9%) participants allocated fish oil supplements and 712 (9.2%) participants allocated placebo. There was no significant difference between the two groups: rate ratio of 0.97 (95% confidence interval 0.87-1.08, p=0.55).

Dr. Louise Bowman, principal investigator, Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford, UK, said: "Our large, long-term randomised trial shows that fish oil supplements do not reduce the risk of cardiovascular events in patients with diabetes. This is a disappointing finding, but it is in line with previous randomised [trials](#) in other types of patient at increased risk of cardiovascular events which also showed no benefit of fish oil supplements. There is no justification for recommending [fish oil supplements](#) to protect against cardiovascular events."

More information: "ASCEND - A randomized trial of omega-3 fatty acids (fish oil) versus placebo for primary cardiovascular prevention in 15,480 people with diabetes", ESC Congress 2018.

Effects of n-3 Fatty Acid Supplements in Diabetes Mellitus, *New England Journal of Medicine* (2018). DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa1804989

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