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Study Shows People with a High Omega-3 DHA Level in Their Blood Are at 49% Lower Risk of Alzheimer's

June 9, 2022, Sioux Falls, SD: New research published today in [Nutrients](#) shows that people with a higher blood DHA level are 49% less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease vs. those with lower levels, according to the [Fatty Acid Research Institute](#) (FARI). The study, led by Aleix Sala-Vila, PhD, suggested that providing extra dietary omega-3 DHA, especially for those carrying the ApoE4 gene (which approximately doubles an individual's susceptibility to develop AD) might slow the development of the disease. Such a cost-effective, low-risk dietary intervention like this could potentially save billions in health care costs.

In this prospective observational study conducted within the [Framingham Offspring Cohort](#) — including 1490 dementia-free participants aged ≥ 65 years old — researchers examined the association of red blood cell (RBC) docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) with incident Alzheimer's Disease (AD), while also testing for an interaction with APOE- $\epsilon 4$ carriership.

Risk for incident AD in the highest RBC DHA quintile (Q5, $>6.1\%$) was 49% lower compared with the lowest quintile (Q1, $<3.8\%$). An increase in RBC DHA from Q1 to Q5 was predicted to provide an estimated 4.7 additional years of life free of AD.

Further, the researchers noted that an increased intake of DHA might lower risk for developing AD, particularly in higher-risk individuals such as those carrying the APOE- $\epsilon 4$ allele, suggesting that they may benefit more from higher DHA levels than non-carriers.

The public health impact of preventing AD with something as simple as a dietary intervention like DHA is also significant. The researchers noted that "Given that estimated health-care payments in 2021 for all patients with AD or other dementias amount to \$355 billion in US (not including caregiving by family members and other unpaid caregivers), any cost-effective strategy for delaying the onset of AD is of utmost public health interest," and that "Delaying AD by 5 years leads to 2.7 additional years of life, and 4.8 additional AD-free years for an individual who would have acquired AD and is worth over \$500,000."

Fatty Acid Research Institute (FARI)

5009 W. 12th St., Ste. 8
Sioux Falls, SD 57106
800-949-0632
www.fareinst.com

So how does this paper stack up to others in this area? "Our study is in line with that of [Tan et al.](#) who reported cross-sectional associations with RBC DHA on cognitive performance and brain volume measurements (with higher DHA being associated with beneficial outcomes) in the same cohort as studied here," said William S. Harris, PhD, President of FARI, and senior author on this recent study.

"Most interestingly, 15 years ago similar findings were reported by [Schaefer et al.](#) in the parents of the individuals who were the focus of this present investigation (i.e., the Original Framingham Heart Study cohort). Schaefer et al. reported that participants in the top quartile of plasma phosphatidylcholine DHA experienced a significant, 47% reduction in the risk of developing all-cause dementia compared with those with lower levels," Dr. Harris continued. "Similar findings a generation apart in a similar genetic pool provide considerable confirmation of this DHA-dementia relationship."

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Media Inquiries:

Bill Harris, President, Fatty Acid Research Institute (FARI)

Email: wsh@faresinst.com

Phone: +1-913-302-9433

Website: www.faresinst.org

About the Fatty Acid Research Institute (FARI)

The Fatty Acid Research Institute (FARI) is a non-profit research and education foundation. FARI was founded in order to accelerate discovery of the health effects of fatty acids, most notably, the long chain omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA. FARI researchers and scientists will focus single-mindedly on publishing high-quality research studies on the multiple relationships between fatty acid levels and human (and animal) health outcomes. These studies will improve the ability to predict risk for disease, and more importantly, suggest ways to reduce risk by changing our diets and/or supplementation regimens. www.faresinst.org

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