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Fish-eating mums have brighter babies

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By Gillian Tsoi

Mothers who eat considerably more fish during pregnancy can increase the intelligence of their newborn babies, according to a new study.

In the study, scientists collected blood samples from 2,000 women at 20 gestational weeks. They also collected blood samples from the umbilical cord of their infants at birth.

The researchers then analysed the samples for concentrations of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, which are found in fish.

The research revealed that the infants scored higher in verbal intelligence and motor skills tests if their mothers consumed more fish throughout their pregnancy. These infants also displayed increased pro-social behaviour.

The aim of this study was to assess the effects of maternal fish intake - as a source of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids - on fetal development. It was conducted as part NUTRIMENTHE project - a European study focused on the importance of diet in the mental development of children.

The most important omega-3 fatty acids are EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid). EPA is said to combat heart disease and depression, while DHA is vital for the development of the central nervous system.

Fish oil is the primary source of DHA, which is the main component of brain cell membranes. A developing baby in the womb needs both DHA and EPA to develop properly.

This study - published in the *Journal of Clinical Nutrition* - was co-ordinated by Professor Cristina Campoy Folgoso at the University of Granada.

A previous study by researchers at the university linked high fish intake of pregnant mothers to higher IQ scores in their eight-year old children.

Higher fish consumption by pregnant mothers was also linked to better visual development of their babies and a lower risk of complications in pregnancy.