

11 July 2013

Statement prepared by the Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) in relation to "Omega-3 linked to prostate cancer" - 11th July 2013

Men in the UK are advised that new research from the US linking Omega-3 and prostate cancer is not conclusive and contradicts pre-existing, robust evidence demonstrating a positive impact of fish oil supplements in this area.

In 2010, a large-scale meta-analysis of 31 studies published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that high levels of fish consumption did not increase the risk of prostate cancer diagnosis. In addition, in the same meta-analysis, data from four studies found a 63% decrease in risk of death from prostate cancer for high fish consumption^[1].

Dr Michèle Sadler, Scientific Adviser to HFMA, said: "This new study from Ohio State University was not designed to investigate the role of Omega-3 intake and prostate cancer, rather to test the effects of Selenium and Vitamin E on cancer prevention and hence no firm conclusions can be drawn. This type of evidence can indicate an association, but does not demonstrate cause and effect."

Furthermore, British consultant urological surgeon Dr Robyn Webber has said in media reports that the study is "controversial" and contradicted much previous advice. Webber also said: "People shouldn't stop eating fish and I still think it's too early to say whether they should stop taking supplements, especially since Omega-3 is said to be to be useful for such things as stroke prevention."

The general public and healthcare professionals are advised to consider the new findings alongside other robust research in this area before formulating public health recommendations.

Earlier this year, Omega-3 supplements also received major recognition for its benefits by having three health claims approved by EU law and supported by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Due to the rigor of this European regulation, not only does this ruling provide further evidence towards the benefits of Omega-3, but it also provides strong testament to its safety.

"The vitamin and mineral supplements industry has an exceptional record of both safety and efficacy, in the UK and worldwide," said Graham Keen, Executive Director of the HFMA. "Figures published by the Food Standards Agency showed that there were only 11 reported reactions to food supplements over an 11 year period, the majority of them in the lowest category of harm. Compared to other foods or medicines, food supplements have an enviable record."

ENDS

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HFMA

Issued by:

Pegasus

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The HFMA

The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) is the voice of the UK's natural health industry and represents more than 125 manufacturers and suppliers of natural health products.

Founded in 1965, the HFMA is a not-for-profit organisation which operates long-standing codes of practice to ensure that member companies adhere to high standards and offer good quality, safe products supported by responsible, lawful information.

For further information about the HFMA, visit www.hfma.co.uk.

^[1] Szymanski KM, Wheeler DC, Mucci LA: Fish consumption and prostate cancer risk: a review and meta-analysis. Am J Clin Nutr2010;92:1223-1233.