

Consumer Reports': Fish oil's efficacy for heart health has its limits

Taking fish-oil capsules once or twice a day is a routine for some seeking heart health.

But *Consumer Reports* and a local physician say there are limits to its effectiveness.

Although the Yonkers, N.Y.-based consumer magazine recommends fish oil to aid cardiac health, the substance is not a panacea for a wide range of ailments, according to Ronni Sandroff, editorial director for *Consumer Reports'* health and family content. "It's more popular than it needs to be and people are taking it for all kinds of reasons," Sandroff said.

Consumer Reports, however, said there is "good evidence" that consuming 1 gram of DHA and EPA omega-3 fatty acids a day can lower the potential for heart attacks and strokes. The polyunsaturated fats it contains may also slow the pace of artery hardening in people with heart disease.

Dr. Jay Midwall, an interventional cardiologist at Good Samaritan Medical Center, said organizations like the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology consider fish oil possibly beneficial in the treatment of stable coronary artery disease as it may lower triglycerides and LDL or bad cholesterol, while raising HDL or good cholesterol. It also tends to make blood platelets less sticky, which can reduce the risk of heart attack, Midwall said. It should be viewed only as a second-line defense, he said.

Aspirin, cholesterol-lowering statins, and beta-blocker drugs, though, are more effective in achieving those goals, the cardiologist said. "It is like a less potent aspirin or Plavix in terms of interfering with platelet function," Midwall said. "Nevertheless fish oil does have some beneficial effect on your lipid profile."

Midwall said fish oil is generally well-tolerated but can cause side effects, including diarrhea, nausea and bloating. And it can increase the risk of bleeding, so many surgeons ask patients to stop taking fish oil supplements before surgery, he said.

Sandroff has a tip for preventing another potential side effect of taking fish oil: bad breath.

"If you keep it in the freezer or take it with a meal there's less of an after-taste with the fish oil," the *Consumer Reports* editor said.

She suggested individuals speak with their physician before taking fish oil supplements or giving them to children.

For the full *Consumer Reports* article on fish oil, click [here](#).

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