Will omega-3 supplements help clear up acne? [1]

Dear Alice,

I am 21 and have had consistent acne. I have tried topical creams (benzoyl peroxide, Retin-A, and topical antibiotics; as well as oral antibiotics for a number of months before). But, the acne keeps coming back.

For acne, does taking omega-3 fish oil supplements help? If so, how does it help, for what length of time should it be taken, and how many milligrams should one take?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Blemishes, zits, pimples ? no matter what you call them, they can be a real bummer! As you?ve clearly seen, there are an abundance of acne treatments out there, but finding the one that works best for you can be a frustrating process. While treatments like benzoyl peroxide, Retin-A, and topical antibiotics may work for some people, everyone?s skin is different. What works for one person may not necessarily work for you. So, what?s the deal with omega-3 fatty acids?

Scientists have found that omega-3 fatty acids have anti-inflammatory effects. This bodes well for omega-3s and their potential for helping to clear up acne as inflammation is one of the most significant factors in acne severity. While there isn?t a ton of research on the effects that omega-3 might have on acne, researchers have found some evidence that points to promising results.

One study (albeit very small) followed five acne sufferers ages 18 to 23 who took a supplement containing omega-3 fatty acids for two months. After the study period, the researchers found a significant decrease in the number of acne lesions and not one participant experienced an increase in acne. However, the placebo effect may have played a role in the findings (acne has been shown to be rather susceptible to the placebo effect). A larger study followed 45 participants with mild to moderate acne who took an omega-3 supplement for ten weeks. After the study period, results showed that both inflammatory and non-inflammatory acne lesions had decreased. While both of these studies are encouraging, there have been similar studies that have shown mixed results ? some participants? acne decreased, some increased, and some saw no effect.

If you want to try omega-3 fatty acids, they?re commonly found in fish and seafood, or you
could try fish oil supplements. In addition to potentially helping acne, omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to reduce risk of heart attack, stroke, and heart disease. They’ve also been shown to lower cholesterol and improve mood disorders such as depression. But don’t run to the fish market just yet? some fish contains high levels of mercury, which can be dangerous to your health. The American Heart Association recommends eating fish in moderation? about twice a week.

Given how little is still known about the benefits of omega-3 fatty acids on acne, you may want to speak with a dermatologist or your health care provider to discuss details like dosage and length of treatment. If you do decide to try supplements, you might find it useful to keep a daily journal and make note of any differences in your acne that you observe.

Just remember that getting rid of acne can take a while, so try to be patient. Once you find the treatment that works best for you, you’ll be admiring your clear skin for years to come!

Alice!

Category:
General Health
Holistic & Integrative Health
Skin Conditions

Related questions
Antibiotics and acne
Getting rid of acne scars?
Blue light therapy for acne?
How can I have acne at thirty?!?
Microdermabrasion for stubborn acne
Health benefits of fish oils

Resources
Medical Services (Morningside)
Medical Services (CUMC)
Published date:
May 14, 2010
Last reviewed on:
Apr 11, 2014
Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/will-omega-3-supplements-help-clear-acne

Links