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## MEDIA STATEMENT

### **Fish oil study leaves open the question of benefits for mothers and babies**

The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI), the industry body representing non-prescription consumer healthcare products said today that a study indicating that there was no benefit to pregnant women from taking fish oil supplements, needed to be treated with caution.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*<sup>i</sup> suggests that the benefit of dietary docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) for pregnant women in reducing postnatal depression and in enhancing cognitive development in their children is overstated.

ASMI Regulatory and Scientific Affairs Director, Steven Scarff said important elements of the study design needed to be taken into account before dismissing the benefits of fish oil supplementation for pregnant women and their children.

The women who were selected for the trial may not necessarily be those who are deficient in DHA. Before the trial began, there was no assessment of the quality or adequacy of any of the women's diets. However, it is significant that some two-thirds of the women who participated had completed secondary and/or further education, so it was a group that was likely to have a better than average diet.

In addition, the control group was also benefiting from being supplemented with essential fatty acids from vegetable sources. These women were given a product designed to match the profile of essential fatty acids eaten in the average Australian diet, and this was taken on top of their regular diet. Therefore neither the active subjects nor the control group were likely to be deficient in these nutrients once they commenced the trial, regardless of their previous nutritional status.

What is perhaps more clear from the study is that supplementation of these nutrients, in the absence of deficiency, showed no significant benefit to pregnant women or their children. Furthermore, it is possible that supplementation of essential fatty acids from vegetable oils was equally beneficial as supplementation derived from fish oils.

Importantly, there was no apparent risk to the mothers or their children from either supplement.

A further avenue of valuable research might be to examine the effects of supplementation on a group that was more likely to be deficient in essential fatty acids.

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About ASMI: The Australian Self-Medication Industry (ASMI) is the peak industry body for the Australian self care industry representing consumer healthcare products including over-the-counter medicines and complementary medicines. ASMI's mission is to promote better health through responsible self-care. This means ensuring that safe and effective self-care products are readily available to all Australians at a reasonable cost. ASMI works to encourage responsible use by consumers and an increasing role for cost-effective self-medication products as part of the broad national health strategy. [www.asmi.com.au](http://www.asmi.com.au)

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<sup>i</sup> Maria Makrides; Robert A. Gibson; Andrew J. McPhee; et al. Effect of DHA Supplementation During Pregnancy on Maternal Depression and Neurodevelopment of Young Children: A Randomized Controlled Trial, *JAMA*. 2010;304, [online article](#).