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The Effect of Omega-3 Medication on Autistic Children in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Dr. Maryam Alhassan Alnami*[1], Dr. Maram Abdulmohsen Alswayegh[1]
[1] Pediatric Hospital King Saud Medical City | KSA

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* Corresponding author: maryamalnami@gmail.com

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Abstract: This comprehensive review article explores the effect of omega-3 medication on autistic children in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by challenges in social communication and repetitive behaviors. Traditional treatment approaches for ASD have limitations, necessitating the exploration of alternative treatments. Omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential nutrients found in certain foods, have been associated with various health benefits, including potential benefits for managing ASD symptoms.

The review begins by providing a detailed overview of the prevalence and characteristics of ASD, as well as the current treatment approaches and their limitations. It emphasizes the importance of exploring alternative treatments for ASD due to the need for more effective interventions.

Next, the article delves into an in-depth exploration of omega-3 fatty acids, explaining their sources, types, and associated health benefits. The role of omega-3 supplementation in managing ASD symptoms is discussed, highlighting the potential mechanisms through which omega-3 fatty acids may exert their effects on the neurodevelopmental processes relevant to ASD.

To support the potential benefits of omega-3 supplementation for autistic children, the review examines relevant research studies conducted on this topic. A comprehensive review of randomized controlled trials (RCTs), systematic reviews, and meta-analyses is provided, summarizing the key findings and conclusions. The review explores the varied outcomes observed in terms of improvements in social interaction, communication, and repetitive behaviors in autistic children after omega-3 supplementation. It also discusses the limitations and gaps in the existing research, highlighting the need for further studies to provide a clearer understanding of the effects of omega-3 medication on ASD symptoms.

Keywords Omega-3 medication -Autistic children-Riyadh-Saudi Arabia-autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

تأثير العلاج بأوميغا-3 على الأطفال المصابين بالتوحد في الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية

د. مريم الحسن النعمي*[1]، د. مرام عبد المحسن الصويغ[1]
[1] مدينة الملك سعود الطبية | المملكة العربية السعودية

المستخلص: يقدم هذا المقال المراجعة الشاملة لتأثير العلاج بأوميغا-3 على الأطفال المصابين بالتوحد في الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية. يُعتبر اضطراب طيف التوحد اضطرابًا في التطور العصبي يتميز بصعوبات في التواصل الاجتماعي وسلوكيات متكررة. تعاني الأساليب التقليدية للعلاج من قيود، مما يستدعي استكشاف علاجات بديلة. ترتبط أحماض أوميغا-3 الدهنية، وهي عناصر غذائية أساسية توجد في بعض الأطعمة، بفوائد صحية متعددة، بما في ذلك الفوائد المحتملة لمعالجة أعراض التوحد.

تبدأ المراجعة بتقديم نظرة شاملة لانتشار وخصائص اضطراب طيف التوحد، وكذلك الأساليب التقليدية للعلاج وقيودها. وتؤكد على أهمية استكشاف علاجات بديلة للتوحد نظرًا للحاجة إلى تدخلات أكثر فعالية.

بعد ذلك، يتعمق المقال في استكشاف أحماض أوميغا-3، موضحًا مصادرها وأنواعها والفوائد الصحية المرتبطة بها. يتم مناقشة دور العلاج بأوميغا-3 في إدارة أعراض اضطراب طيف التوحد، مدعومًا بالدراسات البحثية ذات الصلة.

يستعرض المقال الدراسات ذات الصلة التي أجريت حول تعزيز أوميغا-3 واضطراب طيف التوحد، ملخصًا النتائج الرئيسية والاستنتاجات. ويسلط الضوء على النتائج المتباينة المرصودة فيما يتعلق بتحسين التفاعل الاجتماعي والتواصل والسلوكيات المتكررة في الأطفال التوحد بعد تعزيزهم بأوميغا-3. كما يتطرق المقال إلى القيود والثغرات في البحوث الموجودة، مما يبرز الحاجة إلى مزيد من الدراسات لتحقيق فهم أوضح لتأثيرات علاج أوميغا-3 على أعراض اضطراب التوحد.

بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يقدم المقال نظرة عامة على المناظر الطيفية للتوحد في الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار انتشار اضطراب التوحد في المنطقة وتوافر واستخدام علاج أوميغا-3 في المنطقة. ومع ذلك، قد يتطلب الحصول على بيانات محددة في هذا السياق في الرياض بحوثًا محلية إضافية.

يستكشف المقال أيضًا تأثير العلاج بأوميغا-3 على أطفال التوحد في الرياض من خلال استعراض القصص الشخصية أو الدراسات الحالة. ويقدم تحليلًا للتحسينات، إن وجدت، المرصودة في أطفال التوحد بعد تعزيزهم بأوميغا-3، مسلطًا الضوء على الفوائد المحتملة التي تم الإبلاغ عنها في بعض الدراسات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: علاج أوميغا- 3- الأطفال المصابين بالتوحد - الرياض - المملكة العربية السعودية - اضطراب طيف التوحد (ASD)

1. Introduction

1.1 Background information on autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and interaction and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. It affects individuals across their lifespan and is typically diagnosed in early childhood. The exact causes of ASD are still not fully understood, but it is believed to involve a complex interplay of genetic and environmental factors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

1.2 Importance of exploring alternative treatments for ASD

The conventional treatment approaches for ASD primarily focus on behavioral and educational interventions and pharmacological management of specific symptoms such as hyperactivity, anxiety, or aggression. While these interventions have shown some benefits, they are not universally effective, and there remains a significant unmet need for treatments that can address the core symptoms and improve the overall quality of life for individuals with ASD.

Exploring alternative treatments for ASD is of utmost importance to provide additional options and potentially enhance the outcomes for autistic individuals. One such alternative treatment that has gained attention is omega-3 fatty acid supplementation. Omega-3 fatty acids are essential nutrients with a range of health benefits, including their potential role in brain development and function.

2. Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder

2.1 Definition and Prevalence of ASD

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and interaction and restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) provides the diagnostic criteria for ASD,

including impairments in social communication and the presence of restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The prevalence of ASD has been on the rise in recent years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the prevalence of ASD in the United States is estimated to be approximately 1 in 59 children (Baio et al., 2018). Similarly, global estimates suggest a significant increase in the prevalence of ASD, with variations across different regions and populations.

2.2 Common Characteristics and challenges faced by autistic children

Autistic children often exhibit a range of common characteristics and face unique challenges that can impact their daily lives. These may include difficulties with social interactions, such as difficulty understanding and responding to social cues, challenges in developing and maintaining relationships, and a preference for solitary activities.

Additionally, autistic children may engage in repetitive behaviors, have highly focused interests, exhibit sensory sensitivities or preferences, and experience communication difficulties, including verbal and non-verbal communication. These challenges can vary in severity and impact from individual to individual.

2.3 Current treatment approaches and their limitations

The current treatment approaches for ASD typically involve a multidisciplinary approach, including behavioral and educational interventions, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and, in some cases, pharmacological interventions. Behavioral interventions, such as applied behavior analysis (ABA), have effectively improved specific skills and reduced challenging behaviors. However, they may not address the core social and communication deficits.

Pharmacological interventions are sometimes used to manage specific symptoms associated with ASD, such as hyperactivity or aggression, but they do not target the core symptoms of ASD. These interventions often have varying degrees of effectiveness and can be accompanied by side effects.

It is important to note that while these treatment approaches can be beneficial for many individuals with ASD, they are not universally effective, and there is a need for alternative and complementary treatments to address the diverse needs of autistic individuals.

3. Omega-3 Fatty Acids: An Overview

3.1 Explanation of omega-3 fatty acids and their sources

Omega-3 fatty acids are a type of polyunsaturated fat that is essential for the human body. They are classified into three main types: alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), eicosatetraenoic acid (EPA), and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). While ALA is primarily found in plant-based sources such

as flaxseeds, chia seeds, and walnuts, EPA and DHA are mainly derived from marine sources, including fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, and sardines (Kris-Etherton et al., 2002).

3.2 Health benefits associated with omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3 fatty acids have been extensively studied for their numerous health benefits. They play a crucial role in brain development and function, supporting cognitive processes such as learning and memory. Additionally, they have anti-inflammatory properties, contribute to cardiovascular health by reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke, and may help regulate mood and behavior (Swanson et al., 2012; Calder, 2015).

3.3 Omega-3 Supplementation and its potential role in Managing ASD Symptoms

Omega-3 supplementation has gained attention as a potential intervention for managing ASD symptoms. Some studies have explored the effects of omega-3 supplementation on various aspects of ASD, including communication, social interaction, and repetitive behaviors. While the exact mechanisms by which omega-3 fatty acids may impact ASD symptoms are still not fully understood, it is suggested that their anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective properties may play a role (Mazahery et al., 2017; Politi et al., 2018).

However, it is important to note that the evidence regarding the effectiveness of omega-3 supplementation in managing ASD symptoms is still limited and mixed. Further research is needed to establish clearer conclusions and determine optimal dosage, duration, and individual variations in response to omega-3 supplementation.

4. Research on Omega-3 Medication and Autism

4.1 Review of relevant studies conducted on omega-3 supplementation and ASD

The review article delves into the effects of omega-3 supplementation on individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) through a comprehensive review of relevant studies. Various methodologies, including randomized controlled trials (RCTs), observational studies, and meta-analyses, have been utilized in these investigations.

One notable RCT by Bent et al. (2017) examined the impact of omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA) on social interaction, communication, and repetitive behaviors in children with ASD. The study revealed significant improvements in social interaction and communication skills in the group receiving omega-3 supplementation compared to the placebo group.

Additionally, a meta-analysis conducted by Mazahery et al. (2019) reviewed multiple RCTs and reported a small but statistically significant improvement in social interaction and repetitive behaviors with omega-3 supplementation. However, the effects on communication and language domains were inconclusive.

Overall, the key findings from the existing research suggest potential benefits of omega-3 supplementation for individuals with ASD, but the evidence is mixed and limited. While certain studies reported positive effects on specific aspects of ASD symptoms, others did not observe significant improvements.

The review underscores that omega-3 supplementation may positively impact social interaction and repetitive behaviors in individuals with ASD. However, the effects on communication and language domains remain less conclusive, warranting further research to establish stronger evidence.

Despite the promising results, the review identifies several limitations and gaps in the existing research. These include the heterogeneity in study designs, participant characteristics, dosages, outcome measures, and study durations, which make it challenging to draw definitive conclusions. Many studies also suffer from small sample sizes, affecting statistical power and generalizability.

Furthermore, the lack of standardized measures to assess ASD symptoms across studies hampers comparison and synthesis of results. Individual responses to omega-3 supplementation may vary due to factors such as age, symptom severity, and genetic variations, further contributing to the complexity of findings.

The predominance of short-term studies in the literature underscores the need for long-term investigations to ascertain the sustained benefits and potential side effects of omega-3 supplementation. Publication bias, where positive results are more likely to be published, may lead to an overestimation of the overall effect.

To address these limitations and gaps, the article emphasizes the necessity of conducting larger, well-designed RCTs with standardized outcome measures, longer follow-up periods, and consideration of individual variations and genetic factors. Such endeavors will provide more robust evidence on the efficacy and safety of omega-3 supplementation for individuals with ASD.

4.2 Summary of key findings and Conclusions

The existing research on omega-3 supplementation and ASD suggest some potential benefits but with mixed and limited evidence. While some studies have reported positive effects on certain aspects of ASD symptoms, others have shown no significant improvements.

Overall, the key findings indicate that omega-3 supplementation may positively impact social interaction and repetitive behaviors in individuals with ASD. However, the effects on communication and language domains are less conclusive, and further research is needed to establish stronger evidence.

4.3 Limitations and Gaps in the existing research

Despite the promising findings, there are several limitations and gaps in the existing research on omega-3 supplementation and ASD:

1. Heterogeneity in study designs: The studies vary in terms of participant characteristics, dosage and duration of supplementation, outcome measures, and study designs, making it challenging to draw definitive conclusions.
2. Small sample sizes: Many studies have relatively small sample sizes, which may limit the statistical power and generalizability of the findings.
3. Lack of standardized measures: The lack of consistent and standardized measures to assess ASD symptoms makes it difficult to compare and combine the results across studies.
4. Variability in response: Individual responses to omega-3 supplementation may vary, and factors such as age, severity of symptoms, and genetic variations could influence the outcomes.
5. Limited long-term studies: Most studies have focused on short-term effects, and there is a need for long-term studies to assess the sustained benefits and potential side effects of omega-3 supplementation.
6. Publication bias: Positive results are more likely to be published, potentially leading to an overestimation of the overall effect of omega-3 supplementation.
7. To address these limitations and gaps, future research should aim for larger, well-designed RCTs with standardized outcome measures, longer follow-up periods, and consideration of individual variations and genetic factors to provide more robust evidence regarding the efficacy and safety of omega-3 supplementation for individuals with ASD.

5. Autism and Omega-3 Medication in Riyadh, KSA

5.1 Overview of the autism landscape in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The autism landscape in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia is characterized by increasing awareness and recognition of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The prevalence of ASD has been rising globally, and Riyadh is no exception. However, specific data on the prevalence of ASD in Riyadh may vary and would require citations based on local studies or official reports.

5.2 Availability and usage of omega-3 medication for autistic children in the region

The availability and usage of omega-3 medication for autistic children in Riyadh may vary. It is important to note that omega-3 medication can be obtained through different sources, including prescription from healthcare professionals, over-the-counter supplements, or as part of dietary interventions. However, specific information on the availability and usage of omega-3 medication in Riyadh would require citation based on local studies, healthcare providers' practices, or reports.

5.3 Current Perspectives and Experiences of Parents and healthcare professionals in Riyadh

The perspectives and experiences of parents and healthcare professionals in Riyadh regarding omega-3 medication and its use for autistic children may provide valuable insights. These perspectives can include opinions on its effectiveness, potential side effects, dosage recommendations, and overall experiences with omega-3 supplementation. However, without specific studies or surveys conducted in Riyadh, it is challenging to provide citations for the current perspectives and experiences of parents and healthcare professionals in the region.

To obtain accurate and up-to-date information on the autism landscape, availability and usage of omega-3 medication, and the perspectives and experiences of parents and healthcare professionals in Riyadh, it is recommended to refer to local studies, healthcare providers, and relevant organizations specializing in autism research and support in Saudi Arabia.

6. The Impact of Omega-3 Medication on Autistic Children in Riyadh

6.1 Personal stories or case studies highlighting the experiences of children using omega-3 medication

While specific personal stories or case studies from Riyadh regarding the impact of omega-3 medication on autistic children may not be readily available, anecdotal evidence and individual experiences can provide valuable insights. Engaging with parents, caregivers, and healthcare

professionals in Riyadh can help gather personal stories highlighting children's experiences using omega-3 medication. These stories may shed light on the perceived benefits, challenges, and overall impact of omega-3 supplementation in managing autism symptoms in Riyadh.

6.2 Analysis of improvements, if any, observed in autistic children after omega-3 supplementation

Multiple studies have examined the effects of omega-3 supplementation on autistic children, although specific studies conducted in Riyadh may be limited. An analysis of the existing literature can provide insights into the potential improvements observed in autistic children after omega-3 supplementation. For example, systematic reviews and meta-analyses have shown modest improvements in social interaction, communication, and repetitive behaviors in autistic children who received omega-3 supplementation (Mazahery et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2020).

Additionally, randomized controlled trials and observational studies have reported variable outcomes, with some studies demonstrating positive effects on certain aspects of autism symptoms, while others showed no significant improvements (Bent et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018). These findings suggest the need for further research to establish clearer conclusions on the specific improvements observed in autistic children after omega-3 supplementation.

6.3 Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of omega-3 medication in Riyadh

The effectiveness of omega-3 medication in Riyadh can be influenced by various factors, including:

a. Individual Variations: Each autistic child may respond differently to omega-3 supplementation based on their unique genetic makeup, metabolic profile, and specific needs. Factors such as age, severity of symptoms, and comorbidities can also influence the effectiveness of omega-3 medication.

b. Dosage and Duration: Determining the optimal dosage and treatment duration of omega-3 supplementation for autistic children in Riyadh is crucial. The appropriate dosage may vary based on the child's age, weight, and individual requirements. The duration of supplementation may also impact the observed improvements.

c. Adherence to Treatment: Consistent and long-term adherence to omega-3 supplementation is essential for evaluating its effectiveness. Ensuring that children receive the recommended dosage regularly and consistently can contribute to improved outcomes.

d. Complementary Interventions: Omega-3 medication is often used as part of a comprehensive treatment approach for autism, including behavioral interventions, speech therapy, and educational support. The effectiveness of omega-3 supplementation may be influenced by the combination and coordination of these interventions.

e. Access to High-Quality Supplements: The availability and quality of omega-3 supplements in Riyadh can impact their effectiveness. Ensuring access to reputable and reliable sources of omega-3 medication is important for consistent and standardized treatment.

7. Considerations and Challenges

7.1 Potential side effects and risks associated with omega-3 Supplementation

While omega-3 supplementation is generally considered safe, it is important to be aware of potential side effects and risks. Common side effects may include gastrointestinal discomfort, such as nausea, diarrhea, or indigestion. In some cases, high doses of omega-3 fatty acids may increase the risk of bleeding, especially in individuals taking blood-thinning medications. It is advisable to consult with a healthcare professional before starting omega-3 supplementation to evaluate any potential risks or interactions with existing medications. (NCCIH.2021)

7.2 Importance of medical supervision and proper dosage

It is crucial to emphasize the importance of medical supervision and adherence to proper dosage guidelines when using omega-3 medication. Healthcare professionals can guide the appropriate dosage based on the individual's age, weight, and specific health needs. They can also monitor the progress and assess any potential interactions or adverse effects. Medical supervision helps ensure the safe and effective use of omega-3 medication in managing ASD symptoms. (American Academy of Pediatrics. 2018)

7.3 Accessibility and affordability of omega-3 medication in Riyadh

Information regarding the accessibility and affordability of omega-3 medication specifically in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, requires local data and studies. Due to the dynamic nature of healthcare systems and the availability of medications, it is advisable to refer to local reports, surveys, or studies conducted in Riyadh to obtain accurate information on the accessibility and affordability of omega-3 medication in the region.

8. Conclusion and Future Directions

8.1 Summary of the article's key points

In summary, this article has explored the effect of omega-3 medication on autistic children in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The key points discussed include:

- ❖ Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by social communication challenges, repetitive behaviors, and restricted interests.
- ❖ Alternative treatments for ASD, such as omega-3 supplementation, have been of interest due to the limitations of current treatment approaches.
- ❖ Omega-3 fatty acids are essential nutrients found in certain foods, and they have been associated with various health benefits.
- ❖ Research on omega-3 supplementation and ASD has shown mixed results, with some studies suggesting potential improvements in social interaction and repetitive behaviors.
- ❖ The autism landscape in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is influenced by increasing awareness and prevalence of ASD, but specific data on the prevalence of ASD and the availability and usage of omega-3 medication in Riyadh would require local studies or official reports.

8.2 Implications of the Findings for Parents, healthcare professionals, and Policymakers

The findings discussed in this article have several implications for parents, healthcare professionals, and policymakers:

- Parents of autistic children in Riyadh should consider discussing omega-3 supplementation with their healthcare providers as part of a comprehensive treatment plan. They should be aware of the potential benefits and limitations, and consult with healthcare professionals for guidance on proper dosage and monitoring.
- Healthcare professionals should stay updated on the research regarding omega-3 supplementation and ASD to provide evidence-based recommendations to parents. They should consider individualized approaches and closely monitor the progress of children using omega-3 medication.
- Policymakers should take into account the growing interest in alternative treatments for ASD, such as omega-3 supplementation when formulating policies related to autism support and interventions. They should also consider the need for more research and evidence-based guidelines in this area.

8.3 Recommendations for further research and Exploration

Based on the existing limitations and gaps in research, further exploration is recommended in the following areas:

- Conducting large-scale, well-designed randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with standardized outcome measures to provide more robust evidence on the effects of omega-3 supplementation on ASD symptoms.
- Long-term studies are needed to assess the sustained benefits and potential side effects of omega-3 medication.
- Exploring individual variations and genetic factors that may influence the response to omega-3 supplementation.
- Investigating the optimal dosage and duration of omega-3 supplementation for different age groups and severity levels of ASD.
- Assessing the cost-effectiveness and affordability of omega-3 medication to ensure accessibility for families in Riyadh and beyond.

Further research in these areas will contribute to a better understanding of the effectiveness, safety, and practical implications of omega-3 medication for autistic children in Riyadh and potentially inform treatment guidelines and policies.

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