

# Omega-3 screening to help prevent premature births

 Information for families



**SAHMRI**  
South Australian Health &  
Medical Research Institute

# SA Pathology and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) are evaluating omega-3 screening for pregnant women. Our aim is to reduce the number of babies born prematurely.

## What is omega-3 and why is it important for your pregnancy?

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Omega-3 fats are nutrients commonly found in fish and algae. Enough omega-3 in your body during pregnancy can help you have a full-term pregnancy. Babies born too soon (premature), particularly those born before 34 weeks of pregnancy, may have lengthy stays in hospital and may experience long-term health problems and delays in development.

Women expecting one baby who have low omega-3 levels in their blood are at higher risk of having their baby born prematurely. They are most likely to benefit from omega-3 supplements. Women who have sufficient omega-3 levels are already at lower risk of having a premature baby and do not need to take additional omega-3 supplements.

## What is omega-3 screening?

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Screening or measuring omega-3 levels in blood before 20 weeks of pregnancy identifies women who require omega-3 supplements. This project is evaluating how well an omega-3 screening program will work to reduce premature birth for women expecting one baby. There is not yet a screening test for women expecting twins or triplets.

## How does the omega-3 screening test occur?

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After discussing with you, your health professional will order your omega-3 screening test on the SA Maternal Serum Antenatal Screening (SAMSAS) request form. Your omega-3 level will be measured using the blood being collected for the SAMSAS program. The test is provided free to families.

# Your omega-3 test results

Your health professional will receive your omega-3 test results and discuss these with you at your next appointment.

| Omega-3 test result                              | Health professional advice based on your omega-3 test result   |
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| <b>Less than 3.7%</b><br>(low status)            | <p>Your health professional will recommend taking <b>omega-3 supplements</b> (fish oil or algal oil) to reduce your risk of a premature birth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The suggested dose is 800 mg of DHA and 100 mg of EPA every day.</li><li>• Omega-3 supplements you can take include: Infantem (Pharmamark)* and Omega Brain (Blackmores).</li><li>• If you are vegetarian or vegan, you can take algal oil supplements.</li><li>• You can take supplements from before 20 weeks up until 37 weeks of pregnancy.</li></ul> <p>PLEASE NOTE: If you are already on prescription medication to stop your blood clotting (like Clexane), speak with your doctor before taking omega-3 supplements.</p> |
| <b>Between 3.7 and 4.3%</b><br>(moderate status) | <p><b>You do not need to do anything different from what you usually do.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you are already taking omega-3 fatty acids as part of a multivitamin and mineral supplement, or an omega-3 supplement, you can keep taking these.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Above 4.3%</b><br>(sufficient status)         | <p><b>Omega-3 supplements are not needed</b> and provide no benefit to decreasing your risk of premature birth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you are already taking omega-3 fatty acids as part of a multivitamin and mineral supplement and wish to continue, the dose of DHA and EPA should not be more than 250 mg per day. Taking high doses of DHA and EPA (900 mg per day or more) may increase the risk of premature birth in women with sufficient omega-3 status.</li></ul>   |

\*Vegan algal oil supplement of DHA and EPA.

## Evaluation of omega-3 screening program

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It is important to assess how many women have low omega-3 levels and how many babies were born early since the omega-3 screening started. This will see if screening has reduced the number of premature births in South Australia. We will securely link the omega-3 test results with birth data, without identifying you or your baby in any way. You may decline to have your data linked without affecting you or your baby's care.

*Opting out: If you do not want your data included in the statewide evaluation of omega-3 screening, please email [omega3@sahmri.com](mailto:omega3@sahmri.com) or telephone (08) 8128 4444.*

The evaluation has been approved by the Women's and Children's Health Network (WCHN) Human Research Ethics (HREC) Committee (HREC/20/WCHN/138). Should you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, you may contact the executive secretary of the Human Research Ethics Committee, Mr Luke Fraser, WCHN (08) 8161 6521.



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## Further Information

 Visit [www.sahmri.org/omega3](http://www.sahmri.org/omega3)  
It includes information about supplements with different doses of omega-3

 Speak to your doctor or midwife

If you would like further information about the evaluation of the omega-3 screening program contact us:

 [omega3@sahmri.com](mailto:omega3@sahmri.com)

 (08) 8128 4444