

Eicosapentaenoic acid and/or aspirin for preventing colorectal adenomas during colonoscopic surveillance in the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme: the seAFood RCT

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Plain English summary

The seAFOod RCT

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Plain English summary

Bowel cancer kills > 15,000 people every year in England and Wales. Most bowel cancers develop from a polyp, also known as an adenoma, which is a fleshy growth on the bowel wall. Polyps are found and removed at colonoscopy, which is a large-bowel camera test, but colonoscopy does not prevent further polyps. Use of drugs or dietary supplements (called chemoprevention) may be able to reduce polyp growth and the possibility of developing bowel cancer.

The Systematic Evaluation of Aspirin and Fish Oil (seAFood) trial tested the effects of naturally occurring omega-3 eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) (a dose roughly equivalent to two oily fish portions every day) and aspirin on bowel polyp growth. Patients took EPA on its own, aspirin on its own, EPA and aspirin together or placebo (dummy) medication.

The trial recruited 709 participants who had three or more adenomas found and removed at a NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme colonoscopy and needed a check-up colonoscopy 1 year later. Allocation to one of the four treatment options before the check-up was by chance and 'blinded', so that all participants and trial staff did not know what treatment was taken.

The results showed that there was no reduction in the number of patients who had at least one adenoma at check-up ($\approx 60\%$) in either EPA or aspirin users. However, EPA and aspirin were found to reduce the number of certain types of adenoma in different parts of the bowel by 10–20%. Both EPA treatment and aspirin treatment were safe for patients, with no increased bleeding risk, but EPA caused 10% more symptoms of mild stomach upset, including diarrhoea.

It is concluded that both EPA and aspirin have chemoprevention benefits, which are limited to certain bowel polyp types. The results also suggest that aspirin (possibly with EPA) could be used to help prevent bowel cancers that occur despite colonoscopy.

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