



OMEGA 3

QUALITATIVE CONSUMER RESEARCH
2007

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BACKGROUND

- ⇒ Reynier Research was commissioned by Seafish to undertake a programme of research into consumer awareness and understanding of omega 3
- ⇒ Previous qualitative research was conducted in late 2005 and indicated that awareness was growing and interest in the benefits of omega 3 was high
- ⇒ Now, at the end of 2007, there are a plethora of omega 3 supplements as well as many everyday food and drink products being offered with added omega 3
- ⇒ Seafish wanted to get a picture of where consumer awareness of omega 3 stood and how well known the natural sources were
- ⇒ Also they wanted to understand why and how omega 3 supplements and fortified products were being used
- ⇒ To this end a series of six group discussions were held in the UK during November 2007

SAMPLE

South East Richmond, Surrey

1. Mothers with young children
2. Pregnant women

North Bramhall, Manchester

3. Mothers with young children *
4. Women, empty nesters

Scotland Glasgow & Edinburgh

5. Women, planning pregnancy
6. Mothers with teenage children *

All were:

- C1C2 social class
- chief food shopper for household
- buying & serving fish at least once a month

Half were buying & serving fresh fish once a month

None were only buying tinned tuna

- * Quota set for at least 1 respondent to be buying omega 3 supplement or fortified product

Groups took place between 21st & 29th November 2007

All the groups were moderated by Maureen Reynier

SCOPE OF THE FINDINGS

- ⇒ General observations re. nutrition and diet
- ⇒ Sources of information
- ⇒ Respondent types
- ⇒ Awareness and effect of food labelling
- ⇒ Current fish consumption
- ⇒ Awareness of omega 3 and its sources
- ⇒ Perceived benefits of omega 3
- ⇒ Usage of supplements
- ⇒ Usage of fortified products
- ⇒ Awareness of omega 6 and responses to “balance between omega 3 and 6”
- ⇒ Conclusions

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS RE. NUTRITION AND DIET

⇒ There were some variations by life stage but many common themes:

- **5 a day (almost ALWAYS first mention)**
- **Less salt**
- **Less fat**
- **Less processed food (claimed!)**
- **Avoiding “bad” fats (transfats, hydrogenated fat, saturated fat)**
- **More “chicken, fish, pasta”**
- **Organic where able to afford**

⇒ Most claimed to be “healthier” nowadays

⇒ Certainly feeling that people, generally, were more conscious of diet (although “obesity alert” was topical at the time of the research and this was discussed) these days than in days gone by:

“We used to eat a lot of stews, more red meat, more sponge and custard, we don’t do that now”

⇒ Feel there is a LOT of information available about diet and what one should aim for

TRYING TO EAT A HEALTHY DIET – 5 A DAY

Consumers

Aim for 5 a day

Do not always achieve

But feel good trying

Advice = common knowledge

Children learn it at school

Simplicity of guideline = key

More variety of fruit & veg available

Supermarkets gear offers around 5 a day

Publicity = good

“Trying to get 5 a day, don’t always manage it”

“The children come home with it from school”

“I know they say it should be 5 a day but I do literally eat 5 a day”

“5 a day and more. I love fruit & veg”

“5 a day. I make sure I do that now I’m pregnant”

TRYING TO EAT A HEALTHY DIET – LESS SALT

Consumers

Aware of advice to reduce salt intake

Avoid processed foods
(contain high levels of salt)

Do not add salt to food at table

Do not add salt to food in cooking
water

Salt affects blood pressure, bad
for the heart

*“My mum & my nan used to add salt
to whatever they were cooking,
I don’t”*

*“You can choose less salt nowadays.
Ready meals are high in salt. Don’t
add salt to anything”*

“Low salt and avoid processed foods”

*“You hear things about too much salt,
they (TV) compare salt in products”*

“Salt is bad for the heart”

*“I don’t use salt in cooking but I put
it on the table”*

*“Ready salted crisps have less salt
than any other flavour”*

TRYING TO EAT A HEALTHY DIET – LESS FAT

Consumers

Universal awareness of the fat issue

Too much:

- bad for the heart
- bad for cholesterol
- bad for weight

Some on active low fat diets

Others just cautious, choose low fat where they wish

Types of fat aware of:

- transfats
- hydrogenated
- saturated

“I look at saturated fat, read the label, the whole family, even the dog is on Weightwatchers!”

“I buy all the low fat things, I don’t buy biscuits or cakes”

“I look at the fat content”

“I look for low fat & fat free”

“Light or low and compare it. If it’s a Bolognese sauce & it’s low fat I’ll buy that”

TRYING TO EAT A HEALTHY DIET – MORE CHICKEN, FISH, PASTA

Consumers

Holy trilogy of healthy meal bases

Lighter and 'better for you' than red meat

Add variety

Chicken = especially versatile

Pasta popular with children

Fish known to be 'good for you' & most try to eat

"We eat more chicken & more pasta now"

"Fish, we eat quite a lot of fish"

"Fish, loads of fish"

"I buy the Tilapia from Asda, it doesn't smell of fish at all"

"My son's extremely healthy, he eats fruit with every meal and fish, fresh fish"

TRYING TO EAT A MORE HEALTHY DIET - ORGANIC

- ⇒ There was some mention of buying organic produce
- ⇒ However, this was regarded as quite an expensive option and really was not something that most respondents could afford to do on a large scale
- ⇒ There was mention of organic milk which had a higher level of omega 3 in it:
 - “I get the organic milk that’s got omega 3 in it”*
 - “I get the milk because of the omega 3 in it”*
- ⇒ And organic, omega 3 eggs
- ⇒ Which likewise had a high level of omega 3

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

⇒ As in previous research the following were regarded as reliable sources of information:

- **Newspapers** (esp. Daily Mail Femail section and the Express)

“The Daily Mail do a really good section, I always read that. It’s on a Tuesday, one day a week. My husband reads it first and passes it to me”

“The Express has a good health supplement every week”

- **TV** (Gillian McKeith – You are what you eat & GMTV)

“You are what you eat” on TV, it affects you. It’s what the food does to your body as well. Before you did what you thought was good but that (programme) is really good”

“There’s a series on BBC2 where they got a fitness instructor and got her to eat junk food for a month and got a slightly plump child and got him to eat healthy food. It’s been VERY informative”

“They’re (GMTV) always doing health stuff, features. On salt for instance, they did crisps the other day. Ready Salted crisps have less salt than any other crisps”

- **Weightwatchers:**

“We’re all on Weightwatchers, even the dog’s on Weightwatchers”

- **Schools**

“We promote healthy eating at school, we get a certificate for being a healthy school”

- **Radio**

“Heard something about omega 3 supplements on the radio. Michael von Straten”

THE RESPONDENT TYPES

MOTHERS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

- ⇒ These were busy women with small children and partners to take care of
- ⇒ They claimed that having small children had, in the main, made them more healthy:
“I’m more healthy anyway because of the kids”
- ⇒ If the children were of school age, then they would bring home information about diet etc (e.g. 5 a Day):
“Trying to get 5 a Day, don’t always manage it but we all aim to. The children come home from school with that”
- ⇒ If they were younger than school age, then the mothers would take care they had a healthy diet and this meant being careful about what they ate:
“You try and get them to eat well”
“I go for low salt and avoid processed foods”
“You make doubly sure with them”

MOTHERS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Fussy Eaters

Limited repertoire

Adamant in likes & dislikes

Need to be 'coaxed' to eat more variety

Can be an ordeal

Makes for fractious meal times

"My eldest boy is very difficult, it's not enjoyable"

"My son won't eat fish, I gave him a little bit of salmon the other day, he did try & eat it but that was like ½ an hour!"

"My one year old is a very fussy eater, she takes after her father"

Easy Eaters

Broad repertoire

Will try new things

Actively like fruit & veg

"My little girl will eat anything. She was so hungry when she was a baby we weaned her at 3 months. She loves fish, her favourite is tuna steaks"

PREGNANT WOMEN

- ⇒ We conducted a group with pregnant women
- ⇒ Some were first time mothers-to-be and some were second or third timers
- ⇒ There were clear differences between them:

PREGNANT WOMEN (Cont'd)

First Timers

More nervous

Anxious to do everything correctly

Worry behaviour, diet could affect baby

More 'susceptible' to advice

Second or Third Timers

More relaxed

Less likely to fret

Laissez faire

Still conscientious

Feel 'less information' given to them because second time mothers

Feel more 'on their own'

NB. Examples of 'may as well indulge now' attitudes

Going to put on weight so might as well enjoy it:

"I eat more crap now, more biscuits & cakes than I would when I'm not pregnant"

"I ate lots when I was pregnant because I reckoned I was going to get fat anyway!"

FIRST PREGNANCY

⇒ Definite sense that MOST took great care with first baby:

- Reading all the leaflets
- Taking all the supplements
- Watching diet
- Avoiding alcohol
- Watching what they eat
- Concerned re effect of intake on unborn baby:

“Last time I was really careful”

“I didn’t drink anything, took everything I was told to. Wouldn’t go anywhere there was smoke”

⇒ Those who were contemplating a second pregnancy felt they might be more relaxed this time around, although still be careful re. diet

ADVICE ON DIET IN PREGNANCY

- ⇒ Advice on diet and supplements varied
- ⇒ Some of the second time mothers felt they had more advice the first time round and wondered whether because their midwife knew they had already had a baby they should know what to do
- ⇒ Others had heard conflicting advice especially in relation to fish:

No alcohol!

Folic acid (before & during pregnancy)

5 fruit & veg a day

No raw eggs

No unpasturised cheese/soft cheese

No peanuts (allergies) or should eat peanuts

2 portions of fish a week

BUT:

2 portions of oily fish?
No seafood?
Only 2 portions of oily fish?
Max 2 tins of tuna a week?
Max 3 tins of tuna a week?

ADVICE ON DIET IN PREGNANCY

Folic Acid

Advised to take

Ideally before conception

As a supplement but also in natural
& fortified foods

*“They say you should take folic acid
for 3 years before you get pregnant
& then for so many years afterwards”*

*“A friend of mine took all sorts of things,
she took so much folic acid we joked
her baby would come out GREEN!”*

Pregnancy Supplement

Quite a number of pregnant women were
taking eg PREGNACARE

To get extra vitamins & minerals

Notice Omega 3 versions of these
available & some had ‘traded up’

NB No one taking a supplement prior
to getting pregnant

*“They say omega 3 can affect your
baby’s brain. I take a multi vitamin, the
Pregnacare ones. I think I might get
the one with omega 3 now, but the
others (non O3) were on special offer!”*

APPROACH TO CONCEPTION

- ⇒ There were two schools of thought
- ⇒ One was the cautious, “do everything by the book” approach (favoured by first time mothers, those who had had problems in the past or had had problems conceiving)
- ⇒ Then there was the more casual approach favoured by second time mothers or those who got pregnant very easily/quickly:

APPROACH TO CONCEPTION (Cont'd)

Cautious

Naturally anxious
Follow all advice
Err on the side of caution
Worried about baby

BUT

*"Our mothers all smoked & drank
when they were pregnant & we're alright"*

*"I had a friend who did everything & now
she's got problems with her daughter"*

*"I didn't know I was pregnant, been away
on hen parties, drank to excess"*

Casual

Take it all in their stride

Want to enjoy pregnancy not fret
for 9 months

Okay until encounter problems, then
might re-group

Especially if problems conceiving or
taking too long

*"I wonder if I should be obsessive about
it or just relax, but then would I become
all well behaved if I was pregnant"*

APPROACH TO CONCEPTION

- ⇒ Key issue re. women who are PLANNING to become pregnant was that whilst they were being “well behaved” they did not appear to be overly concerned about taking supplements or really changing their diet
- ⇒ This was because:
 - They did not know HOW LONG it would take them to get pregnant
 - It could be WEEKS or YEARS
 - If they had not had a baby before then they did not know how “easy” it would be for them to get pregnant
 - They did not want to be fussing over their diet and behaviour for YEARS
- ⇒ However, as SOON as they became pregnant they felt they would take action re. diet, behaviour and supplements etc:

“I’m not doing anything with regard to wanting to be pregnant with my diet but if I found out tomorrow that I was pregnant then I’d suddenly go “RIGHT OK”

MOTHERS WITH TEENAGE CHILDREN

⇒ Mothers of teenage children reported:

- **Hearty appetites**
- **Surprisingly good awareness of “healthy diets”**
- **By and large “active” children:**

“They NEVER stop eating”

“The first five years you tell them to eat because they eat nothing, now you just tell them to get away from the fridge and cupboards, it’s constant”

“My son is worse but he’s really healthy, but he eats such a lot, at the gym, all the time”

⇒ There was also debate about school meals

⇒ In Edinburgh, whilst primary schools seemed to have smartened up their act, secondary schools were still serving poor quality food and children were going to the “chippy” at lunchtime to get their lunch:

“There are long queues at school for food. My daughter goes to Gregg's for a healthy sandwich, yet her friends are getting a hamburger, roll and chips from the chippy for 49 pence!!!”

EMPTY NESTERS

- ⇒ Empty nesters were an interesting group
- **VERY aware of diet and nutrition**
 - **Weight conscious**
 - **Look after husband's health too**
 - **Very INTO food**
 - **Like to pander to own taste**
 - **Like to indulge**
 - **Taking supplements as a matter of course to either treat or ward off disease/problems**
 - **VERY interested in dietary guidelines**
 - **Sense of mortality present (inc. partners) – scares re. heart attacks, health problems amongst friends exacerbates the issue**
 - **Husbands at home = issues in all sorts of ways including diet and eating patterns**

EMPTY NESTERS (Cont'd)

Diet

Definitely aim for 5 a day

Aware of 2 a week for fish

Aim for balance

Less red meat

More fish & lighter meats

Calorie & fat conscious

"It's harder to move weight as you get older ...never been a thin person"

Health Issues

Weight control

Cholesterol

Arthritis

Rheumatism

Blood pressure

Wheat allergies

Menopause

Hips

"I've got a weight problem. I go to Weight Watchers"

"I lost 3 stone in 18 months"

"I've started getting hip problems"

Husbands

'Police' diet

Try & prevent weight gain

Can 'interfere' in the kitchen = annoying after years of autonomy

"My husband is at home & it's a real problem. He eats all the time & the kitchen is covered in crumbs the whole time, non stop!"

"My husband never stops eating, he has 10s, 11s & 12s"

AWARENESS OF FOOD LABELLING

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⇒ **There was reasonable awareness of food labelling but more varied comprehension of it**

⇒ All had SEEN the new “traffic light” type of label

⇒ Some were very familiar and at ease with it, using it when they needed to

⇒ Others were conscious but confused about it

⇒ A few were barely aware

⇒ The variation in the labelling made for more confusion for some (i.e. not all traffic light, some are pie charts, lists etc)

⇒ Plus, older women complained about legibility:

“That’s the thing, they’re so SMALL, I can barely read them”

“I need my glasses to see them”

⇒ Not all aware of red, amber, green symbols:

“Red is good isn’t it?”

“I don’t understand why one is green and one is orange”

AWARENESS OF FOOD LABELLING (Cont'd)

Very Aware & Actively Use

Weight Watchers
(calories)

People needing low
fat products

Salt watchers

Low sugar watchers

Children's foods alerts
by mothers avoiding
excess salt, sugar, etc

*"It's bigger & clearer, a
lot easier to understand.
I do look because of my
son. I look at salt"*

Moderately Aware & Occasionally Use

Diet conscious

Look for a low fat/low
calorie sandwich

Don't buy many
processed foods

*"I do buy some ready
meals because I work
& I do look at the
calorie content"*

*"Not going to look at
everything, don't have
the time"*

Marginally Aware & Rarely Use

Barely registered, rarely
look at

Either because low
processed buyers

Or less interested in
nutritional content

Rely on own instincts

*"Not going to look at
everything, don't have the
time"*

"Red is good isn't it?"

EFFECT OF FOOD LABELLING

- ⇒ **It was never the case that ALL foods being bought were scrutinised by their labels**
- ⇒ Some consumer types were more susceptible to looking and choosing products on the basis of what they read
- ⇒ These were:
 - **Mothers of young children trying to avoid the excesses of processed food or irritants (E numbers)**
 - **Women with particular dietary restrictions of their own or their husband's**
 - **Women on weight control diets:**
 - “My husband buys rubbish if he goes shopping. I look at what he's bought and say “That pie will KILL us! It's got 75% of our saturated fat for the day in it!”*
 - “I look at the back and if there are more than 10 ingredients I'll put it back!”*
- ⇒ Those less likely to look were those who seemed less bothered by what they were eating, or who felt they had a good idea of what they should and should not eat anyway:
 - “ I don't look at them, as long as it is all in moderation that's fine”*

CURRENT FISH CONSUMPTION

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- ⇒ In line with other research, feeling amongst consumers that we should eat more fish
- ⇒ Many were good fish eaters
- ⇒ Encouraging children to eat fish
- ⇒ Experimenting with new species (e.g. Tilapia)
- ⇒ Good awareness of 2 a Week advice
- ⇒ **VERY HIGH awareness that OILY FISH = RICH IN OMEGA 3**
- ⇒ Oily fish (e.g. mackerel, sardines etc) eaten by quite a few but an acquired taste
- ⇒ However, salmon = now commonplace and affordable and so good source of omega 3
- ⇒ As were tuna steaks

CURRENT FISH CONSUMPTION (Cont'd)

Commonly Consumed

Tinned tuna
Tuna steaks
Battered or breaded white fish
Poached haddock
Salmon fillets or steaks
Fish fingers or cakes
Cod loin
Prawns

Other Fish Consumed (not as commonly)

Tilapia
Lemon sole
Coley
Mussels
Scallops
Halibut
Mackerel
Sardines
Trout
Smoked salmon

AWARENESS OF OMEGA 3

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- ⇒ **There was high level of spontaneous awareness of omega 3, as there had been in the previous research (November 2005)**
- ⇒ **Even at early stages in the discussions there was often mention (in the context of dietary issues and nutrition) that omega 3 “was good for the brain” or “good for concentration” and that it was found in oily fish**
- ⇒ The use of supplements was also surprisingly high
- ⇒ We recruited in only 2 groups (out of 6) for at least ONE mother to be buying an omega 3 supplement or fortified foods and yet in all the groups at least 3 or 4 and sometimes more were buying omega 3 supplements for their children and/or themselves
- ⇒ Fortified food and drink tended to be seen as subordinate to supplements but were also being bought

SOURCES OF OMEGA 3

Fish (Majority)

Oily fish such as:
mackerel, sardines, salmon,
smoked salmon, trout, herrings,
pilchards, tuna
(tinned tuna?)

However, for some:

*“They’re too fishy for me, the
oily fish, but I do love cod”*

*“Difficult to get children to eat
oily fish”*

*“They’ve got a strong taste, so
I’ve not had much success
(in getting children to eat it)”*

Seeds (Minority)

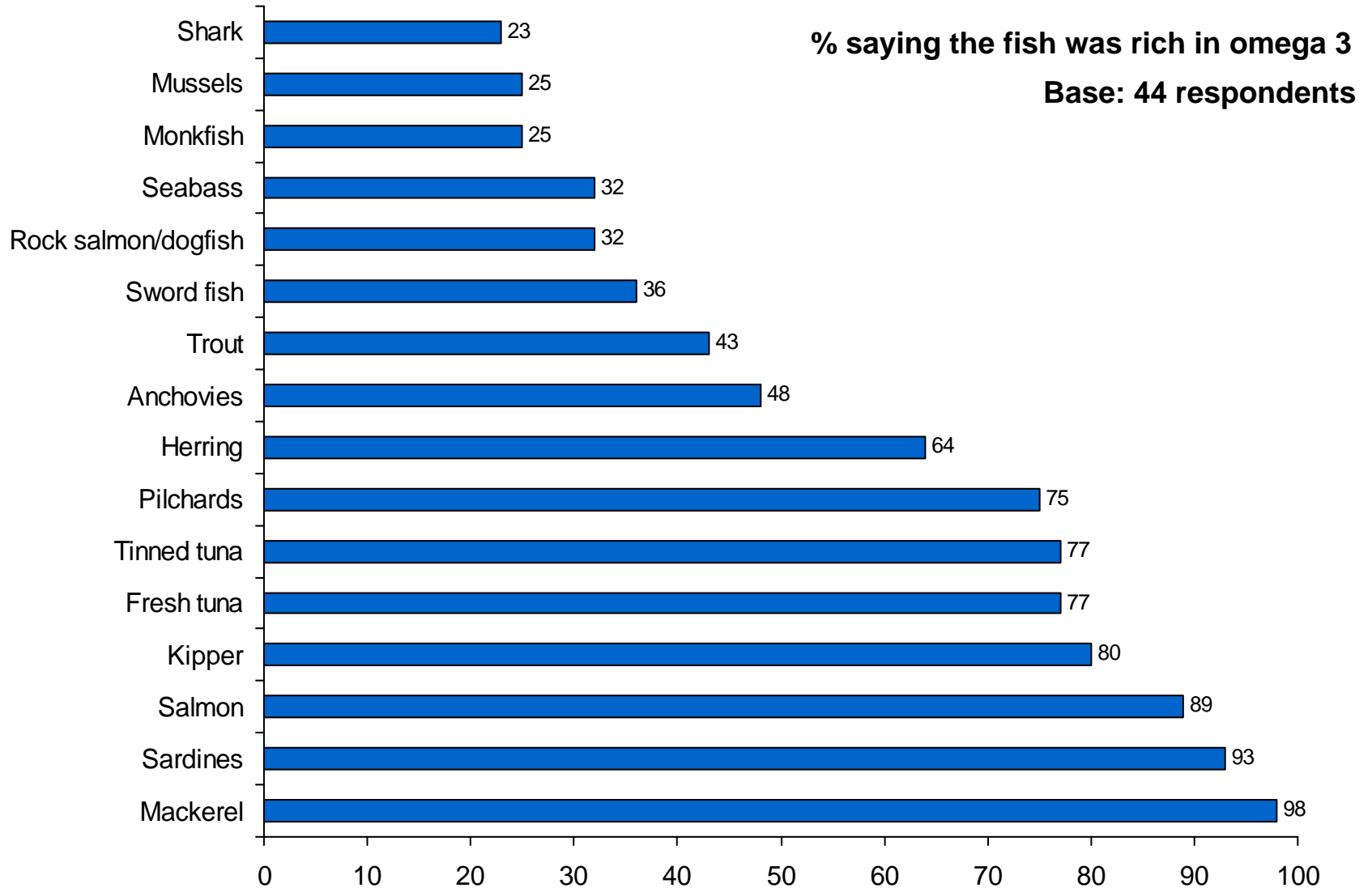
Pumpkin
Sesame seeds
Flax seeds

*“Seeds, I do a muesli in the
morning with lots of seeds,
pumpkin, flax etc”*

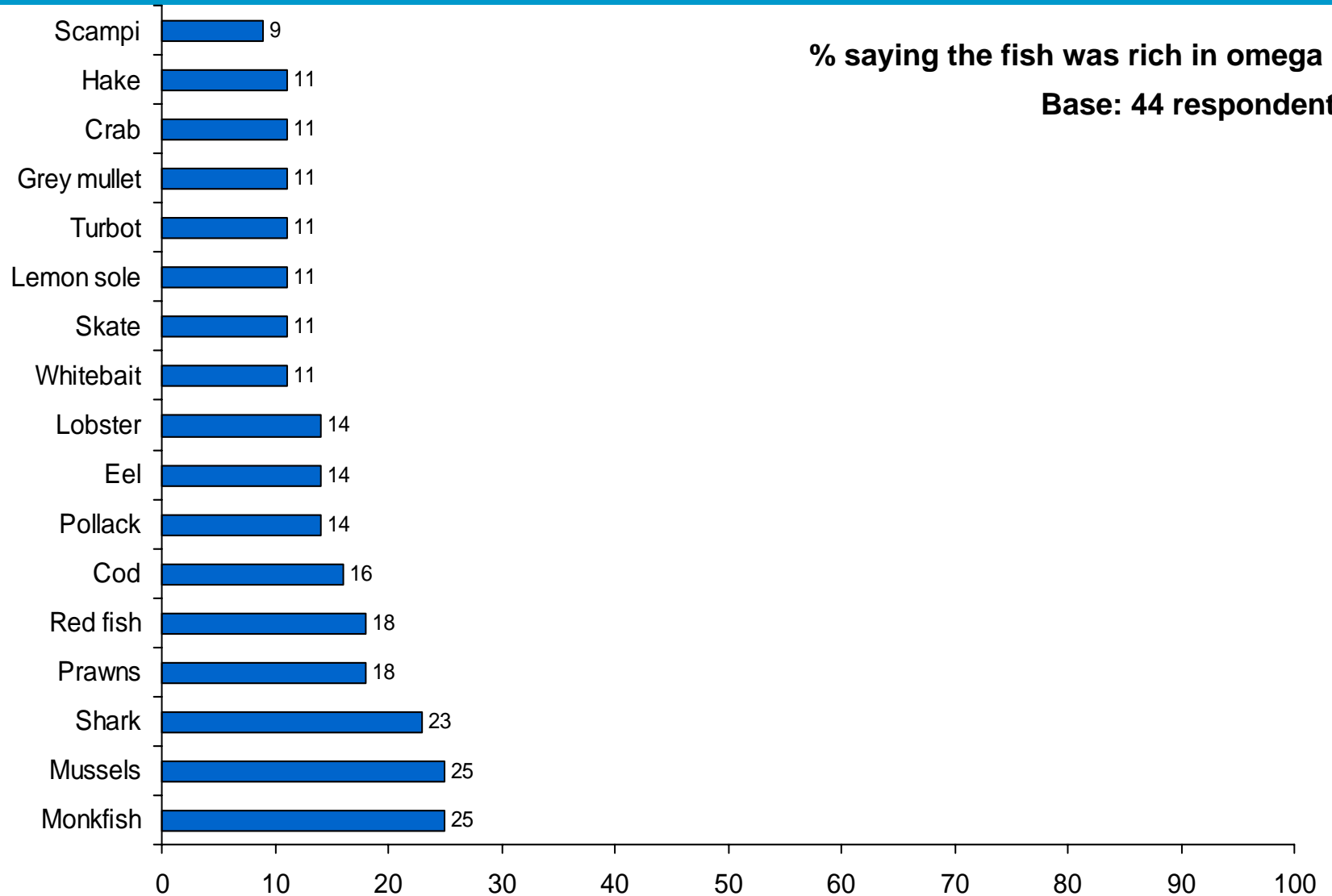
SOURCES OF OMEGA 3 (Cont'd)

- ⇒ We gave respondents a list of fish and asked them to indicate which ones they felt were rich in omega 3
- ⇒ The results are shown over:

SOURCES OF OMEGA 3 (Cont'd)



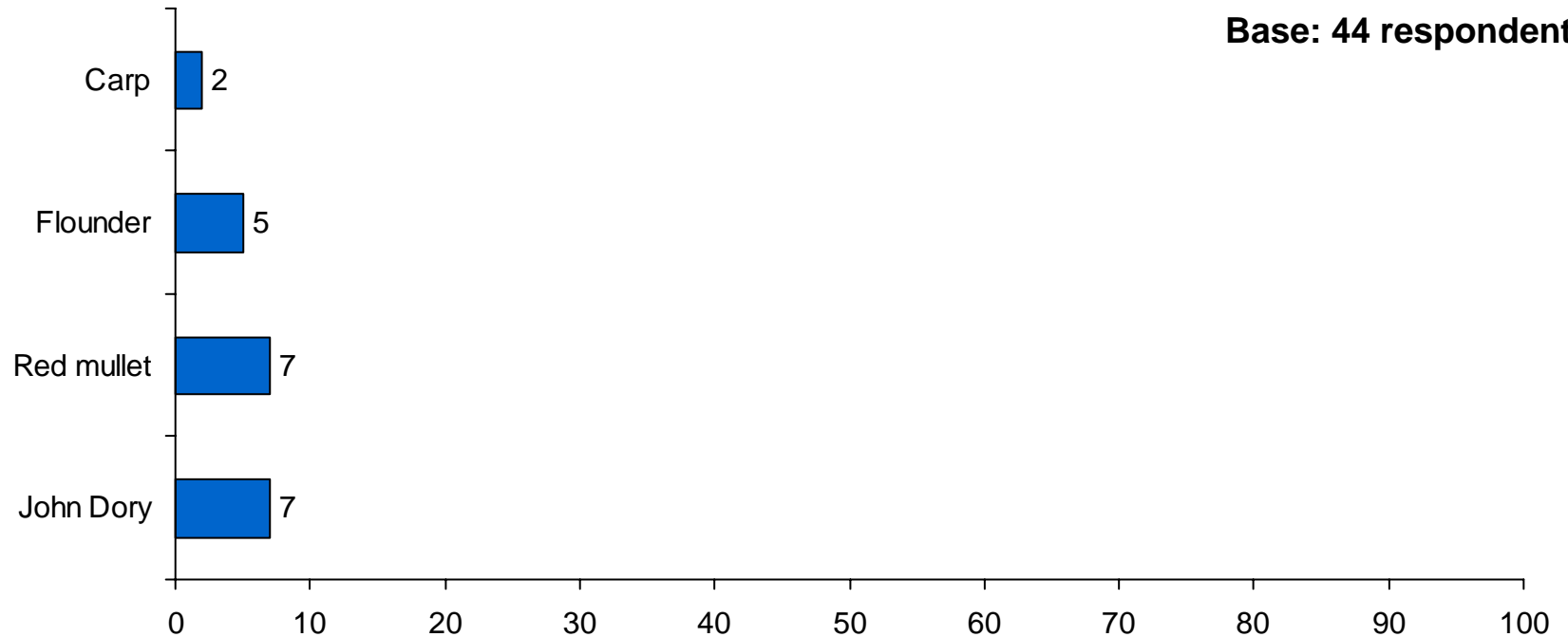
SOURCES OF OMEGA 3 (Cont'd)



SOURCES OF OMEGA 3 (Cont'd)

% saying the fish was rich in omega 3

Base: 44 respondents



SOURCES OF OMEGA 3 - SHELLFISH

- ⇒ There was surprise amongst many of our respondents that omega 3 was present in shellfish
- ⇒ Most were unaware, assuming that it was only the obviously oily fish that were rich in omega 3
- ⇒ **If it were the case that prawns, scampi, crab, mussels etc were good sources of omega 3 then this would represent a SIGNIFICANT breakthrough in willingness to increase intake of natural sources of omega 3**
- ⇒ These were popular fish and if they could be included in the oily fish intake then that was quite a big step forward:

“I’d quite happily eat lots of shellfish”

“My husband stops me cooking prawns because of the cholesterol problem but I love them”

“We LOVE calamari!!”

“That’d be good if shellfish had omega 3 but we’re not allowed to eat any shellfish when we’re pregnant in case of food poisoning”

“We love prawns and scampi, good if they had omega 3 in them”

BENEFITS OF OMEGA 3

⇒ The impression of the majority was that omega 3 was “good for the brain”:

“The brain, it’s good for concentration”

“For children, it improves brain function”

“Helps your concentration”

“Good for the brain, they always say that”

“Make your children cleverer”

“To help children concentrate”

⇒ In addition, there were some who claimed benefits in terms of:

- **Senile Dementia/Parkinson’s**
- **Cancer prevention**
- **Heart health**
- **Joints (arthritis and rheumatism)**
- **Bones:**

“No, it’s not just children, for Senile Dementia too, it can stop the onset of Senile Dementia. You can start taking it in your 50s to stop your concentration dropping”

USAGE OF SUPPLEMENTS

- ⇒ **We came across a significant number of respondents who were taking omega 3 supplements themselves and/or giving them to their children**
- ⇒ Those who were doing this SEEMED to be quite wedded to the habit
- ⇒ It did not appear to be a whim (as is often the case with vitamin supplements)
- ⇒ They had adopted the routine and claimed to be going to continue into the foreseeable future
- ⇒ **There was evidence of a deep dependence on it amongst some:**
 - “I lost my job in July and there was one thing I made sure we still had and that was EyeQ. Even my Mum was buying it for me, making sure the kids still had it. It’s £7.99 a pack, quite expensive”*
 - “I’ve not got hard and fast evidence but I’d be frightened NOT to take it now”*
 - “They’ve taken it for 3 or 4 years now, ever since I read about it. I think, possibly, their concentration levels are better, but they’ve taken it all the time they’ve been at school so I don’t have anything to compare it to”*
- ⇒ We shall now look at the prompts to start taking supplements

PROMPTS TO TAKE OMEGA 3 SUPPLEMENTS

Specific Child Related Prompt

Child suffering from some (attention) disorder

Either recommended by health professional or 'researched' by parent

Behaviour improved

Now 'committed' to use because to stop could lead to deterioration in behaviour

"One of my daughter's teachers said her levels of concentration were pretty low & it was about the time they started advertising omega 3...so she was taking a vitamin anyway so I just changed it to one with omega 3 in it. The teachers have noticed a difference"

PROMPTS TO TAKE OMEGA 3 SUPPLEMENTS (Cont'd)

General wish to help children at school

Heard omega 3 good for children's brains
& concentration

Prompted by looming exams

Noticed or reported better behaviour,
concentration, etc

Now 'committed' because to stop
might impair their progress

*"In the school I work in parents have been
advised to give omega 3 to their children
by the psychologist"*

"Everyone tries to give their kids the best"

"If it's going to help them then you'll buy it"

*"My 15 year old is doing exams so I'm
going to try him on it"*

*"If they stopped taking it, it would have
an effect. It's laid out at breakfast"*

PROMPTS TO TAKE OMEGA 3 SUPPLEMENTS (Cont'd)

Children taking vitamin tablet already Upgrading to omega 3 add on

Children already taking a multi vitamin

Mothers noticed omega 3 being added to some children's vitamin capsules

Heard positive things about omega 3

Nothing to lose attitude & possibly something to gain

"During the winter you'd give them vitamins to help them against colds, so now if they've got omega 3 in there as well then that's better, quite a new thing"

"Me I started 2 years ago, vitamins plus omega 3"

"My son has Haliborange. He doesn't have a concentration problem at all but I started to give them to him, I feel better because he's got omega 3 & vitamins"

PROMPTS TO TAKE OMEGA 3 SUPPLEMENTS (Cont'd)

Specific Adult Medical Issue

Heart attack

Joint problems
(arthritis & rheumatism)

Forgetfulness

Parkinson's

"My husband had a heart attack so he has omega 3"

"I have cod liver oil, glucosamine, chondroitin, advised by the health food shop. I have rheumatism & I'm on steroids at the moment and it helps"

"My husband's on omega 3. He's got MS as well. He takes omega 3 for his joints"

"I buy omega 3 tablets because I started forgetting things, but I keep forgetting to take them!"

PROMPTS TO TAKE OMEGA 3 SUPPLEMENTS (Cont'd)

Adult Preventative, Well being, Pregnancy

Taking omega 3 for general well being (brain, heart, joints)

Taking omega 3 to ward off disease

Taking omega 3 during pregnancy, usually as part of 'pregnancy multi vitamin'

"The benefit is long term. My mother had a hip replacement last year & her sister is housebound. I wonder if I'm going the same way so I take omega 3"

"I take cod liver oil for the omega 3, good for the joints"

"I take an omega 3 supplement, I went off oily fish in the early months so I took omega 3 then and I've kept it up"

"I take Pregnacare with omega 3, saw it on the back of a bus"

USAGE OF SUPPLEMENTS

- ⇒ The usage of supplements was founded on a number of factors:
 - **Reluctance/unwillingness to eat sufficient/any oil-rich fish to get omega 3 naturally**
 - **“Guarantee” with a supplement that a desirable dose/RDA was being taken compared to the variability/uncertainty of how much omega 3 is in certain fish**
 - **Ease of taking a capsule compared to buying, preparing and cooking oil-rich fish**
- ⇒ Many of those taking supplements were taking them INSTEAD of eating oily fish
- ⇒ Only a small minority of our sample were able to claim they received enough omega 3 from the oily fish they ate:
 - *“We love tuna, salmon and swordfish, we have one of those twice a week and then sardines on toast once a week”*
- ⇒ Those taking supplements may well be eating oil-rich fish as well
- ⇒ But NOT frequently enough or in enough quantity to feel they were getting sufficient omega 3
- ⇒ Hence their reliance on supplements
- ⇒ This was the case amongst adults and even more marked amongst children who often did not like oil-rich fish and therefore refused to eat it
- ⇒ (Salmon and tuna would be the main fish that children were getting omega 3 from)

USAGE OF SUPPLEMENTS (Cont'd)

No/Little Oily Fish Rely on Supplements

Many children & a lot of adults

Oily fish = less attractive & appealing
than white fish

An effort to include oily fish in diet

An acquired taste (mackerel, herring
sardines)

Salmon, tuna & prawns = easier gateway

Palatable & enjoyable for many

"I do like salmon & I really wanted to love it (oily fish) but I don't really like oily fish"

"I cook haddock & then put a bit of Flora on it to add omega 3!"

"If my children ate lots of fish that'd be fine but my son won't try it. I gave him a little bit of salmon the other day. He did try it but it was like ½ an hour! So I gave him the Haliborange. If he had a better diet I wouldn't bother"

They're (children) not getting enough omega 3 in their diet"

"Because we don't have oily fish everyday, maybe twice a month, so this is guaranteed omega 3, it helps them at school"

USAGE OF SUPPLEMENTS (Cont'd)

Some Oily Fish Augmented with Supplements

Partial to some oily fish

Eat occasionally

Feel better taking a supplement
because not reliant on natural source

More confidence in dosage

*“We do eat some oily fish, like in the
summer when we’re on the coast,
but I do give them (children)
supplements too”*

USAGE OF SUPPLEMENTS (Cont'd)

Eat Good Amount of Oily Fish No supplements

Significant fish & oily fish consumption

Like fish a lot & happy to up intake if necessary

Regard supplements as unnatural

“Mackerel, I eat that all the time”

“We eat a lot of fish, salmon, trout, sardines on toast, tinned salmon”

“Twice a week I’d say, tinned mackerel, sardines, lovely under the grill”

“Twice a week for us, sardines, mackerel, tuna & salmon, a lot”

USAGE OF SUPPLEMENTS (Cont'd)

Do not eat much Fish
Not Concerned re Omega 3
Do not take Supplements

Heard of advice re oily fish

Some awareness of supplements

On periphery of thoughts

Discussion could prompt trial
"Might start taking it now"

FACTORS AFFECTING CHOICE OF SUPPLEMENT - CHILDREN

- ⇒ Those who were taking omega 3 on a daily basis (which most users were except for the occasional lapse in memory) were fairly loyal to a brand
- ⇒ **For children then Haliborange or EyeQ were the preferred brands:**
 - Based on (for Haliborange) long tradition of children's vitamin supplements:
 - "I buy Haliborange, they're £8.99 for 90 tablets"*
 - "Haliborange, you've heard of them, you know the name"*
- ⇒ And for EyeQ active promotion amongst health professionals and plugs in the media:
 - "I buy EyeQ, it's more expensive but it's recommended by psychologists"*
 - "EyeQ was mentioned by Trevor MacDonald in that TV programme"*
- ⇒ There did not APPEAR to be any trading down to private label where children were concerned
- ⇒ If they were going to give their children omega 3 then, it seemed, they were going to give them the best

FACTORS AFFECTING CHOICE OF SUPPLEMENTS - ADULTS

- ⇒ Where adults were concerned and they were buying omega 3 for themselves or their partners, then there was a sense they WERE expensive to buy and some were buying own label
- ⇒ On the basis that it must “all be the same”
- ⇒ Holland & Barrett, Superdrug, Asda and Boots all had their own omega 3 supplements which were cheaper than branded ones
- ⇒ Plus, it was a category very susceptible to offers (BOGOFF, 3 for 2 etc):
 - “I buy Boots, you can ask what the equivalent of the brand is”*
 - “I buy Asda or Holland & Barrett own label, they have good offers”*
 - “I buy by price really, definitely the price”*
 - “They often have offers on them in Holland & Barrett”*
 - “I go for the cheapest, the girls at Holland & Barrett are very good”*
- ⇒ Those who were buying premium brands did so on the basis that they must be better because they were more expensive:
 - “I buy the Seven Seas, they say cheap vitamins are not very good and that the more expensive ones are better”*

OMEGA 3 - DOSAGE

⇒ **There was a lot of confusion as to what was the RDA for omega 3**

⇒ When it came to fish they had NO IDEA how much omega 3 was in a portion (if they knew what a portion was!) of oil-rich fish:

“How much is in a portion? How much in a tin of sardines?”

⇒ When it came to supplements, then they were also uncertain

⇒ There were mentions of:

- 400mg
- 500mg
- 1000mg

⇒ **The fact that the supplements did not have an RDA added further to the mystery!!!**

“I thought 500 mg was the RDA”

“It says here the RDA has not yet been established. How do you know if you’re taking too much or too little”

“I follow the instructions, I’ve never looked at how much”

“I assume there’s the right amount in them (supplements)”

⇒ **If one was eating oily fish AND taking supplements could one overdose?**

AWARENESS AND USAGE OF FORTIFIED PRODUCTS

AWARENESS AND USAGE OF FORTIFIED PRODUCTS

- ⇒ There was reasonable awareness of fortified products
- ⇒ There seemed to be more and more of these products around and there was some up take of them
- ⇒ However, views on the notion varied, with some being pro and others anti the fortification of everyday foods with omega 3
- ⇒ Products that had been noticed/bought for their omega 3 content were:
 - **Milk**
 - **Eggs**
 - **Fish fingers**
 - **Bread**
 - **Spreads**
 - **Yoghurt drinks**
 - **Breakfast cereal**

AWARENESS AND USAGE OF FORTIFIED PRODUCTS (Cont'd)

Positive View

See as 'more the merrier'

Happy to 'trade up'

Happy to pay premium

Do not expect significant dosage of omega 3

But 'every little helps'

Will become as commonplace as added vitamins

Good for those who do take supplements or eat oily fish

Neutral View

Indifferent

Have noticed

Not prepared to pay a premium

Dismissive of amounts

Unmoved by claims

Negative View

Bandwagon view

Manufacturers taking advantage of consumer vulnerability

Preying on anxieties

A fad which will fade away

Uncertain quantities of omega 3 compared to a supplement

THE POSTIVE VIEW

- ⇒ These were (mostly) mothers who saw these fortified products as yet another easy way to incorporate a source of omega 3
- ⇒ They did not appear to be using these products INSTEAD of a supplement
- ⇒ The amounts in the products were anticipated or known to be small and could NOT deliver a daily dose of omega 3:

“You’d have to drink about 20 pints of milk a day!!”

- ⇒ They saw these products as yet another little bit of omega 3 adding to the daily total
- ⇒ If they were not using supplements then it helped to add to the fish that was being eaten
- ⇒ If they were using supplements then it would not do any harm to have a bit more omega 3:
“I buy the fish fingers, that’s on top of the omega 3 I give them”
- ⇒ For children who really did not eat ANY fish then it was an accessible source of omega 3 (even if it was not a daily dose)
- ⇒ If they were buying the product anyway and it then came with omega 3, then they were happy to trade up:

“I was buying the pro-biotic yoghurt for the good bacteria anyway, so now I buy the one with omega 3 in it”

THE NEUTRAL VIEW

- ⇒ They had noticed the products
- ⇒ And some had dallied with purchasing but did not consistently purchase
- ⇒ They had tried the products out of interest but had not integrated them into their repertoires:

“I have bought that bread a few times but often it was the only bread left so I bought it”

- ⇒ Uncertainties about amount of omega 3 in products = puzzling:

“If they advertised HOW much we’re supposed to have and how much was in these then we could make our own judgment”

THE NEGATIVE VIEW

- ⇒ There were quite a few of these women who felt this was just exploitation:
“Sometimes I think they’re all jumping on the bandwagon”
- ⇒ There were, according to them, negligible amounts of omega 3 in the products
- ⇒ They were NOT the same as taking a daily supplement:
“I’d rather go for a supplement because you KNOW what you’re getting, with these you don’t know how much is in them”

SUMMARY OF SOURCES OF OMEGA 3

| | Advantages | Disadvantages |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Oil-Rich Fish | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natural Pure Good for you No extra cost, part of family food budget Tastes good Incorporate into meal plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquired taste Especially difficult for some children Unknown quantities of omega 3 What is a portion? |
| Supplements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guaranteed dose Daily habit Convenient Child friendly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive Have to remember to take |
| Fortified foods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy to incorporate into diet Readily available Child friendly Buying anyway | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More expensive Uncertain quantities of omega 3 |

AWARENESS OF OMEGA 6

AWARENESS OF OMEGA 6

- ⇒ There was very limited awareness of omega 6:

“Heard that there were more and I THINK it was omega 6”

- ⇒ A few had seen it as a supplement in health shops (usually as part of an omega multi-product):

“Seen it on the shelf as a separate supplement with omega 3, 6 and 9 in it. I thought what on earth is that supposed to do for you now!”

- ⇒ The majority had not heard of it

- ⇒ They were unaware that omega 6 was present in processed foods

- ⇒ Or that too much of it impaired the body’s ability to process omega 3

- ⇒ In fact, they were puzzled, wondering if there was ANY good omega 6 or whether it was all bad:

“Is any omega 6 good for you?”

- ⇒ They felt the information was most confusing. Just when they thought they had understood omega 3 there was new information to bamboozle them!

“Never heard of omega 6, no that sounds confusing”

“How do we know when we’ve got that balance (between omega 3 and 6)”

“Trevor MacDonald needs to do a programme on it!”

CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

- ⇒ Awareness of omega 3, its benefits and sources was **VERY HIGH**
- ⇒ Taking of supplements was a **SIGNIFICANT** finding
- ⇒ Our quota was for only **TWO** out of our entire sample to be taking an omega 3 supplement **OR** buying food fortified with omega 3
- ⇒ In reality **AT LEAST HALF** were either giving to their children, taking themselves or both
- ⇒ **AND**, it did not appear to be a passing fad, most were wedded to the idea and also concerned that withdrawal of omega 3 supplements would have a detrimental effect
- ⇒ Supplements were taken more seriously than fortified food and drink
- ⇒ Although the fortified products had their own, supportive, role to play
- ⇒ The consumption of oil- rich fish was reasonable
- ⇒ But there were still barriers to greater consumption as we have encountered before

CONCLUSIONS (Cont'd)

- ⇒ **The wide availability of supplements has made it easy for people to adopt this as a route to getting their dose of omega 3**
- ⇒ **So, for those who feel they do not/cannot attain the goal of two portions of fish a week one of which should be oil-rich, then this is the obvious answer**
- ⇒ **The barriers to eating oil-rich fish are:**
 - **Getting children to eat the right fish**
 - **Oil-rich fish (as in mackerel, sardines, pilchards, herring etc) being an acquired taste**
 - **Only *really* liking white fish**
 - **Being squeamish about these very fishy fish (preferring haddock or boneless cod fillets)**
- ⇒ **However, salmon and tuna steak ARE very popular and encouraging greater consumption of these would be relatively easy**
- ⇒ **PLUS, if shellfish can claim omega 3 properties then this too would be a great step forward**
- ⇒ **Prawns, scampi, mussels, crab etc are very popular and would help widen the “pool” of oil-rich fish available to consumers, making the task of getting omega 3 from natural sources easier**

CONCLUSIONS (Cont'd)

- ⇒ **So, promoting oil-rich fish as the best natural source of omega 3 requires:**
- Clarification of **WHAT** a portion of oil-rich fish is
 - Clarification of how much omega 3 is in a portion (and how this relates to the FSA guidelines)
 - Making sure that people **KNOW** that salmon and tuna steaks are good sources of omega 3
 - Introducing the idea that shellfish can count towards the allowance
 - Encouraging people to do this **RATHER** than taking supplements on the basis of:
 - Naturalness
 - Less expensive than supplements (because have to buy food to eat anyway) and a portion of oil-rich fish is a week's supply of omega 3 compared to seven capsules
 - Get all the other health benefits of fish as well as omega 3
 - Provide more child and family friendly recipes using oil-rich fish
 - Publicise the wider benefits of omega 3 a la fact sheet on Seafish website