

15 November 2021

On 19 April, SA Pathology and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) began testing omega-3 levels for women with singleton pregnancies in South Australia.

Since its commencement, participation in the program has steadily increased and more than 100 omega-3 status tests are performed per week, accounting for approximately 30% of singleton pregnancies in South Australia. About 17% of women are found to have low omega-3 status and require specific advice regarding supplementation to lower their risk of early birth.

Based on feedback provided by health professionals during in-services and seminars, and backed by the latest evidence, SAHMRI have updated their pregnancy care guidance for women with sufficient omega-3 status. The new guidance recognises that some women with sufficient status wish to take prenatal vitamin and mineral supplements that contain low doses of omega-3 fatty acids, although they are not needed to reduce prematurity risk. This new guidance will be reflected in test results issued from 17 November. The findings from a recent randomised controlled trial and the update of the Cochrane review provide evidence to support that not exceeding 250 mg omega-3 DHA+EPA per day will be safe and will have no effect on prematurity or other pregnancy outcomes.

- Pregnant women with a low omega-3 status, less than 3.7%, are recommended to take omega-3 fatty acid supplements until 37 weeks to reduce the risk of early preterm birth.
Suggested dose: 800 mg DHA and 100 mg EPA per day.
Typical suitable supplements include Infantem (Pharmamark)* and Omega Brain (Blackmores)
- Women in the moderate range, 3.7 - 4.3%, are not required to take a supplement however if already taking omega-3 fatty acids as part of a multivitamin supplement, this may continue.
- Women with sufficient omega-3, above 4.3%, omega-3 supplements are not required and provide no benefit to risk of early preterm birth. If already taking omega-3 fatty acids as part of a multivitamin and mineral supplement and wish to continue, the dose of DHA+EPA should not exceed 250 mg per day.

* Vegan algal oil supplement of DHA and EPA.

When the omega-3 status test box is ticked on the SAMSAS request form, omega-3 analysis is performed at no cost to the patient or health service, using serum collected as a part of the established SAMSAS program.

The SA Pathology-SAHMRI collaboration will evaluate the omega-3 status test. Women may opt-out of the statewide evaluation of the screening program without affecting the provision of care.

To order the maternal serum screening test request forms or the updated Families or Health Professional brochures, please call the SAMSAS Program on (08) 8161 7285. The maternal