

Fish Diet Appears to Ward Off Parkinson's Disease

30.Nov.07

The Vancouver Sun

by Aaron Derfel

Eating two servings of fish a week could protect you from developing Parkinson's disease, a Quebec City researcher suggested Wednesday.

A study by Laval University showed that laboratory mice that were fed a diet rich in a specific type of omega-3 fatty acid found in fish did not develop Parkinson's, even when they were given a toxic compound that usually causes symptoms similar to the disease.

The mice were fed very high doses of the omega-3 acid known as DHA, which is not the same as the omega-3s contained in some vegetable oils. What's more, the researchers were unable to say how much of DHA humans should consume to achieve the same protection against Alzheimer's.

However, two servings of fish a week would probably help, said Frederic Calon, co-author of the study.

"What we expect is that [DHA] can have a similar effect in humans and, hopefully, could prevent the disease or slow down its development at the beginning," Calon added.

More than 100,000 Canadians suffer from Parkinson's, a degenerative disorder of the central nervous system that causes chronic trembling of the hands, arms, legs, jaw and face as well as stiffness of the limbs. The disease affects mostly people in their 60s and 70s, but in rare cases some people in their 30s and 40s have what is called young onset Parkinson's.

The study was funded by the Parkinson Society of Canada. One of the society's major sponsors is Burnbrae Farms, which markets omega-3 eggs.

"Basically, it is encouraging," John Provenzano, director of communications for the Parkinson Society, said of the study results.

"We live in a part where our diets are not rich in omega-3 fatty acids."

Calon urged consumers to beware of some food products that boast claims of being rich in omega-3s.

First, some of these products don't contain DHA, and second, even if they do, they might not contain enough DHA to be effective.

Therefore, the prudent thing to do would be to eat fish, he advised.

One serving of fish can contain two grams of DHA. Some studies have recommended a diet of 500 grams a day in omega-3s.