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Fat comes in good and bad forms, and too much bad fat in your diet can contribute to obesity.

However, research has shown that too little fat can also be very bad, particularly for children.

Nancy Morse, Chief Scientific Officer of UK natural healthcare company Efamol Ltd specialising in research and development of essential fatty acids supplements, explained during her visit to Australia in March that the so called 'good fats' are essential to children's development and brain function.

"There are two 'families' of essential fatty acids (EFAs), the omega-6 and omega-3 series, which are an essential component of a healthy diet as they cannot be produced by our body," Morse explained.

"About 60 per cent of the human brain is made of fat and the most abundant fatty acid in the brain is DHA (docosahexaenoic acid). Since our body cannot produce essential fatty acids, we need to ensure that they are present in sufficient quantities in our diet or through supplements," she said.

Morse gave five reasons why essential fatty acids are crucial to children's brain and body

development:

- Fatty acids are involved in producing substances that help regulate bone formation. For children, they are really important as they constantly need to create body tissues to grow.
- Fatty acids are also linked to the development of healthy and supple joints.
- A deficiency in essential fatty acids may contribute to a range of health problems in children including abnormal behaviour and mood, learning and concentration difficulties, bone abnormalities, asthma, eczema and allergies.
- Omega-3 and omega-6 also help children's brain receptors communicate the right message. If the brain receptors happen to be surrounded by the wrong fat, they will respond incorrectly.
- Essential fatty acids are also needed by the body for the role they play in the structure of nerve cells in the eye.

Other benefits of consuming the right fatty acids include younger looking and healthier skin. Since fatty acids can also help to lower blood pressure and the incidence of irregular heart beat, a person with a recommended level of omega-3 would be more likely to avoid a heart attack.

Long chain omega-3 fatty acids are found in abundance in oily fish and, to a lesser extent, in white fish, other seafood, lean meat and eggs, which should all be a component of a healthy diet.

Unfortunately, the body's conversion of fatty acids to Long Chain Polyunsaturated fatty acids is an inefficient process, especially in the very early and late stages of our lives and during times of stress or illness, hence the need to supplement with DHA-rich fish oil.

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