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Reply to FJ Rosales

Dear Sir:

We thank Rosales for his generous review of the Older People And n–3 Long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acid (OPAL) study (1) and are grateful for the opportunity to respond to some points raised in his letter.

We would first like to state that, contrary to the title of Rosales’ letter, the OPAL study compared the effect of 500 mg docosahexaenoic acid plus 200 mg eicosapentaenoic acid with olive oil on cognitive function in older people. Second, as stated in our report, participants in the placebo arm were asked to consume two 650-mg capsules containing olive oil daily—equal to 1.3 g olive oil/d. Third, we would like to correct the misapprehension that our Table 3 provides information on change in serum fatty acid profile in study participants between baseline and 24 mo. In fact, as we did not measure baseline serum fatty acid concentrations, Table 3 compares serum fatty acid concentrations in the intervention and placebo arms after 24 mo of intervention. Without information on baseline serum oleic acid concentrations it is not possible to comment on the potential health effects of any putative changes in concentrations. And finally, we concur that there is a growing body of epidemiologic evidence suggestive of an association of consumption of a Mediterranean-style diet with cognitive function in later life, although we are skeptical that the small amount of olive oil provided in the OPAL study could mimic these possible benefits.

Over the past 2 y, 4 randomized controlled trials evaluating the effect of n–3 long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids on various measures of cognitive function in older people have been published: 2 trials used olive oil as the placebo (1, 2) and 2 used a mixture of corn and soy oil as the placebo (3, 4). Unfortunately, the results of all 4 of these trials have been largely negative, suggesting that factors other than the content of the placebo supplement are important in determining the outcome of long-term intervention studies on cognitive function in later life (5).

The authors had no conflicts of interest to declare.

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REFERENCES


