

Ethyl-EPA found to reduce the rate of brain atrophy

A small, randomized double-blinded study found that ethyl-EPA reduced the rate of atrophy of the head of the caudate nucleus and the posterior thalamus. Thirty-four stage I and II patients were randomized to receive either two grams of ethyl-EPA (Amarin's Miraxion) or a placebo. Magnetic resonance imaging scans were done at baseline, six months and twelve months. A statistically significant reduction in atrophy was found for the treatment group at six months. The rate of atrophy was similar in the two groups in the second six months.

Despite several years of open label and small or relatively brief double-blinded clinical trials, it is still not clear whether ethyl-EPA will treat Huntington's Disease, either the symptoms or the disease itself, and if so, for how long and through what mechanism.

A recent Phase III trial of ethyl-EPA (Amarin's Miraxion) was not successful. The trial was short-term, six months, and designed to see whether Miraxion would improve motor symptoms as measured by improvement in Total Motor Score 4, a subscale of the United Huntington's Disease Rating Scale. At the end of the trial no significant differences were found. However, a high percentage of the trial participants elected to continue and at that point all participants were given the ethyl-EPA. At the end of a year, statistically significant differences were obtained between those who had originally been on ethyl-EPA and those who were in the placebo group - even though all had been taking ethyl-EPA for the previous six months.

At this point, ethyl-EPA remains in the pipeline. The data is suggestive but not conclusive.

Reference:

BK Puri, GM Bydder, MS Manku, A Clarke, AD Waldman, and CJ Beckmann.
Reduction in Cerebral Atrophy Associated with Ethyl-eicosapentaenoic Acid Treatment in Patients with Huntington's Disease. The Journal of International Medical Research 2008 Sep-Oct;36(5):896-905.

Marsha L. Miller, Ph.D., October 12, 2008