Today’s piece was prepared by Emily Vigianno, MD, based on a NY Times article [Do DHA Supplements Make Babies Smarter?](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/30/well/do-dha-supplements-make-babies-smarter.html?_r=0)

This article challenges a claim common in the infant formula industry that the omega-3 fatty acid supplement DHA improves infant brain development. The article cites a [recently published Cochrane Collaboration systematic review](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD000376.pub4/full) that found no significant difference in neurodevelopmental outcomes between infants fed formula containing DHA and those fed formula without DHA. The article cites several credible meta-analyses and accurately explains their findings. It also contextualizes the findings by describing the history of DHA marketing by infant formula companies, and correctly questions the validity of their claims.

Yet the article also provides balance by describing the theoretical basis for DHA supplementation, given the role of DHA in brain and retinal development. It includes expert opinion that DHA is unlikely to be harmful and may have some beneficial effects that are difficult to prove. More importantly, it emphasizes the importance of obtaining nutrients like DHA through a healthy, balanced diet.

Overall, the article offers a nice balance between explaining the lack of evidence for neurocognitive benefits while also describing the limitations of studying nutritional supplements. A weakness of the article is that it fails to mention the other long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acid, arachidonic acid (ARA) that is also used in infant formulas.

**RESOURCES ON D.H.A. IN INFANT FORMULA:**

[Questions & Answers for Consumers Concerning Infant Formula](https://www.fda.gov/food/foodborneillnesscontaminants/peopleatrisk/ucm108079.htm#16) *US FDA responses about evidence behind DHA and ARA*

[Infant Formulas](http://pedsinreview.aappublications.org/content/pedsinreview/32/5/179.full.pdf) *Pediatrics in Review (2011) This article discusses the physiologic role and potential health benefits associated with 4 components added to these formulas, including DHA and ARA*

[Omega-3 Fatty Acids and Maternal and Child Health: An Updated Systematic Review](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK395921/) *This 2016 AHRQ Evidence Reports/Technology Assessments source is for professionals*

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!