



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MERCURY IN FISH AND SHELLFISH

Fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet. Fish and shellfish contain high-quality protein and other essential nutrients, are low in saturated fat, and contain omega-3 fatty acids. A well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fish and shellfish can contribute to heart health and children's proper growth and development. So, women and young children in particular should include fish or shellfish in their diets due to the many nutritional benefits.

However, nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of mercury. For most people, the risk from mercury by eating fish and shellfish is not a health concern. Yet, some fish and shellfish contain higher levels of mercury that may harm an unborn baby or young child's developing nervous system. The risks from mercury in fish and shellfish depend on the amount of fish and shellfish eaten and the levels of mercury in the fish and shellfish. Therefore, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are advising women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children to avoid some types of fish and eat fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.

By following these 3 recommendations for selecting and eating fish or shellfish, women and young children will receive the benefits of eating fish and shellfish and be confident that they have reduced their exposure to the harmful effects of mercury.

1. Do not eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel, or Tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.
2. Eat up to 12 ounces (2 average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.
 - o Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish.
 - o Another commonly eaten fish, albacore ("white") tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna. So, when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish, you may eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna per week.
3. Check local advisories about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in your local lakes, rivers, and coastal areas. If no advice is available, eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, but don't consume any other fish during that week.

Follow these same recommendations when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but serve smaller portions.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MERCURY IN FISH AND SHELLFISH

- ***"What is mercury and methylmercury?"***

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and can also be released into the air through industrial pollution. Mercury falls from the air and can accumulate in streams and oceans and is turned into methylmercury in the water. It is this type of mercury that can be harmful to your unborn baby and young child. Fish absorb the methylmercury as they feed, so it builds up in them.

- ***"Is there methylmercury in all fish and shellfish?"***

Nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of methylmercury. However, larger fish that have lived longer have the highest levels of methylmercury because they've had more time to accumulate it. These large fish (swordfish, shark, king mackerel and tilefish) pose the greatest risk. Other types of fish and shellfish may be eaten in the amounts recommended by FDA and EPA.

- ***"I don't see the fish I eat in the advisory. What should I do?"***

If you want more information about the levels in the various types of fish you eat, see the FDA food safety website www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/sea-mehg.html or the EPA website at www.epa.gov/ost/fish.

- ***"What about fish sticks and fast food sandwiches?"***

Fish sticks and "fast-food" sandwiches are commonly made from fish that are low in mercury.

- ***"The advice about canned tuna is in the advisory, but what's the advice about tuna steaks?"***

Because tuna steak generally contains higher levels of mercury than canned light tuna, when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish, you may eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of tuna steak per week.

- ***"What if I eat more than the recommended amount of fish and shellfish in a week?"***

One week's consumption of fish does not change the level of methylmercury in the body much at all. If you eat a lot of fish one week, you can cut back for the next week or two. Just make sure you average the recommended amount per week.

- ***"Where do I get information about the safety of fish caught recreationally by family or friends?"***

Before you go fishing, check your Fishing Regulations Booklet for information about recreationally caught fish. For further information about the safety of locally caught fish and shellfish, visit the Environmental Protection Agency's Fish Advisory website www.epa.gov/ost/fish.

For information about the risks of Mercury in Seafood call toll-free

1 (888) SAFEFOOD

[1 (888) 723-33663]

Or Visit FDA's Food Safety Website www.cfsan.fda.gov/seafood1.html

Source: www.cfsan.fda.gov/seafood1.html