

MERCURY IN SEAFOOD

A GUIDE FOR CONSUMERS

Seafood has many healthy nutrients. But all fish are not equal when it comes to mercury levels. Fish that are smaller or lower on the food chain – like shellfish, anchovies, sardines, salmon and tilapia – contain much less mercury than large, top predators such as tuna and swordfish. **So how can you balance the health benefits of eating fish with the risk of exposure to mercury?** The answer is simple - eat seafood that is low in mercury and limit your consumption of high-mercury fish.

The goal is to be smart about which fish we eat and the quantities we consume.

Fish can be part of a healthy diet. It is a good source of protein and omega fatty acids and is low in saturated fat. For guidance on mercury levels in fish, refer to the “Which Fish and How Much?” chart in this brochure.

START WITH A “FISH LIST”

If you eat seafood, take a moment to list the kinds of seafood you prefer. Then estimate the size of portion you normally consume and how often. (Hint: A four to six ounce serving is roughly the size and thickness of the palm of your hand.)

Next, check your “fish list” against the **Which Fish and How Much?** chart on the following page. Depending on the mercury levels that correspond to your list, you may need to adjust how much and/or how often you enjoy your favorite seafood. This chart also shows you low-mercury alternatives if your favorite fish turn out to be mostly high-mercury species, such as tuna, swordfish, sea bass or grouper.

If you are pregnant, breastfeeding or feeding young children, check the chart and you’ll see that eating low-mercury fish can be part of a healthy diet. In fact, low-mercury seafood is beneficial for brain development in the fetus and developing baby.

WHO IS AT RISK?

The neurotoxic effects of methylmercury (MeHg) are well documented. That is why **pregnant women, fetuses and young children** are considered at greatest risk.

– Women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or who plan to be pregnant within a year, and children less than 12 years old, should eat **ONLY** low-mercury fish.

– **People who eat fish frequently or who favor top predator fish** (such as swordfish or tuna) may also be at risk.

NOTE: As a consumer, you should be aware that chunk “light” tuna has less mercury than albacore “white” tuna. **Canned tuna accounts for 33% of total mercury exposure in the U.S.**

THREE SIMPLE RULES:

1. Choose low-mercury, high omega-3 fatty acid seafood to maximize benefits and minimize risks. 2. Limit your consumption of higher mercury fish. 3. If you are part of the “at risk” group, (pregnant, breastfeeding or feeding young children) choose **ONLY** low-mercury seafood.

If you or a loved one routinely consumes high-mercury seafood, or if you are experiencing symptoms from the list to the right, ask your doctor to check your mercury levels – just to be safe. This can be easily done with a blood test.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS of METHYLMERCURY (MeHg) EXPOSURE

Higher Level MeHg Exposure

- Numbness or tingling in hands and feet
- Clumsy gait; difficulty walking
- Slurred speech
- Tunnel vision
- Diminished visual acuity

Chronic, Lower Level MeHg Exposure

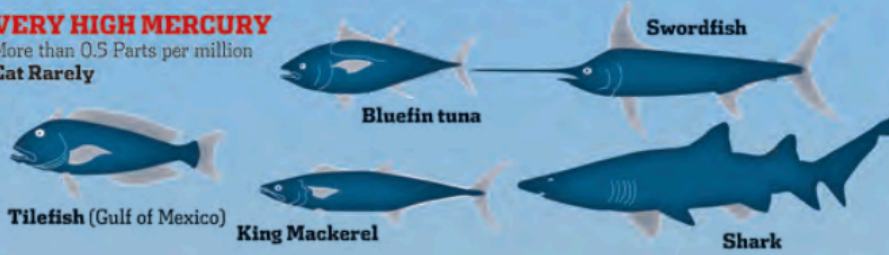
- Sleep disturbance
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Depression
- Memory loss
- Diminished fine motor coordination
- Muscle and joint pain
- Gastrointestinal upset
- Hair thinning
- Heart rate disturbance
- Hypertension
- Tremor
- Numbness or tingling around the mouth

WHICH FISH AND HOW MUCH?

(Estimates of servings for a 130 lb. woman)

VERY HIGH MERCURY

More than 0.5 Parts per million
Eat Rarely



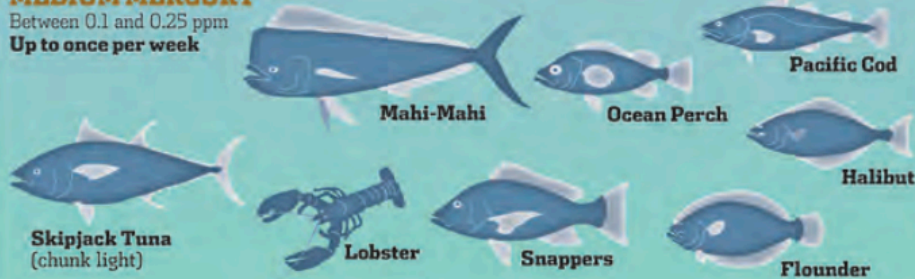
HIGH MERCURY

Between 0.25 and 0.5 ppm
About 2 times per month



MEDIUM MERCURY

Between 0.1 and 0.25 ppm
Up to once per week



LOW MERCURY

Less than 0.1 ppm
2-3 times per week

*Good source of Omega-3 fatty acids



Karimi et al., 2012, Environmental Health Perspectives, A quantitative synthesis of mercury in commercial seafood and implications for exposure in the U.S.

Portion guide



1 serving = 4 to 6 oz.

This is roughly the size and thickness of the palm of your hand.

About 2 servings per week (8-12 oz.) of a fish that is low in mercury meets the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, American Heart Association and Environmental Protection Agency/Food and Drug Administration advice for fish consumption.

The "at risk" groups:



Pregnant or breastfeeding women and young children should eat ONLY low mercury fish.

For children under 12:

Estimate about 1 oz. per 20 lbs. of body weight for a child who is not overweight. For example: a 40 pound child could eat a 2 ounce serving.

Graphic by John Blanchard, 2015

