



Protecting Yourself and Your Family from

MERCURY IN FISH

Information for:

- Women who are pregnant or might become pregnant
- Women who are breastfeeding
- Children and teens less than 17 years old

Fish are nutritious and good for you to eat. Most fish are safe to eat. But some fish may contain a dangerous chemical called mercury. If you eat the wrong kinds of fish, or too much fish, you can get mercury in your body. If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, mercury can harm your baby, too.

What is mercury?

Mercury is a type of metal found in soil, rock, air, and water. It is used in thermometers, batteries, lamps, and other products. Some industries release mercury into the air, soil, and water.

How can mercury harm my baby?

Mercury can harm your baby when you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Babies born to mothers who have a lot of mercury in their bodies may develop more slowly and have problems learning. Young children can also be harmed by mercury. If you are worried about your child's health, call your doctor.

Can I eat the fish from stores or restaurants?

Most fish that you buy in stores or restaurants are safe. But even these fish may contain mercury. For all fish and shellfish you buy, follow the guidelines shown in the table on the next page.

What about fish that family or friends catch?

Fish from some areas of California have mercury or other chemicals in them. These areas have warnings called "health advisories." Health advisories tell you the kinds and amounts of fish that are safe to eat. Always follow the health advisory for the areas where your fish were caught. If there is no advisory, follow the guidelines shown in the table.

What about children?

Mercury can harm children, too. There are special guidelines for children and teens less than 17 years old. Be sure to follow the guidelines, shown in the table.



Planning to become pregnant?

Begin following the safety guidelines 1 year before becoming pregnant, if possible. This gives your body time to get rid of mercury from fish you have already eaten.

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR EATING FISH

DO NOT EAT shark, swordfish, tilefish, or king mackerel.

**PREGNANT WOMEN, BREASTFEEDING WOMEN,
AND WOMEN WHO MIGHT BECOME PREGNANT**

Fish You Buy in a Store or Restaurant

Up to **2 MEALS A WEEK (12 ounces)** of fish and shellfish bought in stores or restaurants.

OR

Fish Caught by Friends or Family

Always follow health advisories for areas where fish are caught. If there are no advisories:

Up to **1 MEAL A WEEK** of fish caught by friends or family

CHILDREN AND TEENS LESS THAN 17 YEARS OLD

Same as above but serve smaller portions

1 meal is about 6 ounces of cooked fish or $\frac{1}{2}$ pound (8 ounces) of uncooked fish.

1 can (6 ounces) of chunk light tuna is 1 meal. You can eat up to two cans a week. Tuna steak and canned albacore (white) tuna have more mercury. You can eat up to 6-ounces of albacore or tuna steak a week, but no other fish that week.

6 ounces of fish is about the size of 2 decks of cards.

8 ounces ($\frac{1}{2}$ pound) of uncooked fish is about the size of a thin paperback book.



Tips for lowering mercury from the fish you eat:

- Do not add the recommended amounts. For example, if you eat $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of fish caught by friends or family, do not eat any other fish that week.
- If you eat more than the recommended amount of fish in a week, eat less than the recommended amount the next week.
- Eat store-bought farmed catfish, tilapia, wild salmon, pollock, shrimp, and scallops which have little or no mercury.
- Eat different kinds of fish.
- Eat chunk light tuna instead of albacore (solid white) tuna or tuna steaks. It has less mercury.
- Do not eat the guts of the fish.
- Eat smaller fish rather than larger fish because they generally have less mercury.
- Cleaning and cooking fish will not get rid of the mercury. Be sure to follow the guidelines and advisories.

For information about health advisories, contact:

- **Your local health department:** www.dhs.ca.gov/home/hsites/hdlinks.htm
- **California Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment/Pesticide and Environmental Toxicology Section**
(916) 327-7319 or (510) 622-3170 www.oehha.ca.gov/fish.html

