

A GUIDE TO EATING FISH

For women, children and families



Health Canada recommends eating at least two Canada's Food Guide Servings of fish each week that are high in omega-3 fatty acids and low in mercury.

Fish is an excellent source of protein and other nutrients that are important to a healthy diet. However, certain types of fish may contain levels of mercury that can pose a risk to your health. This guide is designed to help women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, women who might become pregnant, and people who are caring for infants and children, make healthy fish choices.

Is fish good for my health?

Yes. Besides being an excellent source of protein, many types of fish are an excellent source of omega-3 fatty acids (omega-3s). One type of omega-3, called

DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), helps to develop the brain and eyes of fetuses, infants and children. It may also improve language skills and coordination in infants and children. It is especially important that the following people eat a variety of fish to get DHA:

- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Women who might become pregnant
- Infants and children

Omega-3s
are important at
all ages, to reduce
the risk of heart
disease

Breastfed babies can get DHA through breast milk if the mother includes DHA in her diet.

What about mercury in fish and shellfish?

Nearly all fish and shellfish contain mercury, but some types contain much higher levels than others and are more of a concern. Exposure to high amounts of mercury can be harmful, especially for pregnant women, infants and children. Fetuses and infants exposed to high levels of mercury may experience delays in walking, talking, memory and attention span. High levels of mercury can be toxic for children and adults, and can increase their risk of heart disease.

What about canned tuna?

Canned tuna contains lower levels of mercury than fresh and frozen tuna. This is because smaller types of tuna are used for canning. When purchasing canned tuna, choose "light" tuna more often than "white" or "albacore" tuna, because it has less mercury.

1-800-361-5653

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How about salmon?

Salmon is very high in omega-3s and low in mercury. However, there has been some concern about the level of PCBs (a type of pollutant) in salmon. If you follow the guide provided here, and include a variety of fish in your diet, your level of exposure to PCBs should be acceptable for both farmed and wild salmon. When possible, choose wild salmon more often than farmed salmon, because it is lower in PCBs. Canned salmon is generally wild.

What about raw fish?

Pregnant women should not consume any raw fish, including that found in sashimi and some sushi dishes. Raw fish may contain bacteria or parasites that can lead to illness and/or fetal complications. In addition, sashimi and sushi dishes often contain fresh or frozen tuna, which are high in mercury.

Remember, it is important to include fish in a healthy diet. York Region Community and Health Services

advises women to continue to eat fish during pregnancy and while breastfeeding, because of the many benefits it provides.

The key is to eat a variety of fish and to choose wisely.

Additional resources

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide — Health Canada
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

The Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish
 Ontario Ministry of the Environment
www.ontario.ca/fishguide

Learn more about sustainable fish options at SeaChoice
www.seachoice.org

For more information on eating fish or other health-related topics, please call York Region Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 or visit www.york.ca

EAT a VARIETY of FISH and CHOOSE WISELY

One Canada's Food Guide Serving of fish is 75 grams or 2.5 ounces or about ½ a cup.

Choose OFTEN (low mercury fish)

• 2 servings a week for infants and children		• 4 servings a week for women and teenagers		• Unlimited servings a week for women aged 50+ and men			
Anchovies Ω	Arctic Char Ω	Basa	Clams	Cod	Flounder	Haddock	Herring Ω
Kamaboko	Mackerel, Atlantic Ω	Mackerel, Pacific Ω	Mussels	Octopus	Oysters	Pollock	Prawns
Salmon Ω	Sardines Ω	Scallops	Shrimp	Smelt Ω	Sole	Squid	Tilapia
Trout, Rainbow Ω	Tuna, Canned, Light	Whelk					

OR

Choose SOMETIMES (medium mercury fish)

• 1-2 servings a month for infants and children		• 2-4 servings a week for women and teenagers		• 4 servings a week for women aged 50+ and men			
Black Cod	Catfish	Crab	Crawfish	Croaker	Dolphin Fish	Eel	Grouper
Hake	Halibut	Lobster	Mackerel, King Ω	Mackerel, Spanish Ω	Mahi Mahi	Perch	Sablefish
Skate	Snapper	Striped Bass Ω	Sturgeon	Trout, Lake Ω	Tuna, Canned White or Albacore		
Turbot	Whitefish	Whiting					

OR

AVOID or Choose RARELY (high mercury fish)

• Less than 1 serving a month for women, infants teenagers and children				• 1 serving a week for women aged 50+ and men		
Barracuda	Escolar Ω	Mackerel, Snake Ω	Marlin	Orange Roughy	Pickerel (Walleye)	Pike
Sea Bass	Shark	Swordfish	Tilefish	Tuna, Fresh or Frozen		

Ω These fish have higher levels of omega-3s, which are important to health.

If your child weighs less than 16.5 kilograms or approximately 36 pounds, you may choose to reduce the serving size

These guidelines apply only to fish bought at the market or store. For information on fish caught in local lakes or streams, visit the Ministry of the Environment's Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish

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