

**Advice for Women Who Are Pregnant, or Who Might Become Pregnant, and
Nursing Mothers, About Avoiding Harm To Your Baby Or Young Child From
Mercury in Fish and Shellfish
Guidelines and Contact Information
Mid-Atlantic Region**

Fish and shellfish are an excellent source of nutrition and most people have no reason to limit their fish consumption. However, the developing nervous system of a baby and young child is more sensitive to mercury's harmful effects than the more fully developed nervous system of an older child or adult. Because of this the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommend that women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children limit the consumption of fish.

If you follow the advice given by FDA and EPA you will gain the positive benefits of eating fish but avoid any developmental problems from mercury in fish.

Pregnant women, women who might become pregnant, young children, and nursing mothers should follow these three rules:

1. Don't eat Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel, or Tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.
2. Levels of mercury in other kinds of fish can vary. Eat up to 12 ounces (two average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.
 - Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock and catfish.
 - Another commonly eaten fish, albacore tuna ("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 (Table 1 has contact information for your state) about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in your local rivers and streams. If no advice is available, you can eat up to 6 ounces (one meal per week) of fish you catch from local waters, but don't consume any other fish during that week.

Follow the same rules when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but the serving sizes should be smaller.

Frequently Asked Questions about Mercury

How does Mercury get into fish?

Mercury falls from the air into surface waters, like streams and oceans. Bacteria in the sediments cause chemical changes that transform mercury into methylmercury that can be toxic. Fish absorb methylmercury as they feed on aquatic organisms.

Can't we trim away or clean or cook fish to get rid of the mercury?

No, methylmercury gets into the flesh of fish, it can't be cut away, cleaned or cooked out.

What about tuna?

Tuna is one of the most frequently consumed fish in the United States. Mercury levels in tuna vary. Tuna steaks and albacore tuna generally contain higher levels of mercury than canned tuna. You can safely include tuna as part of your weekly fish consumption.

But I thought fish was good for me when I am pregnant?

Fish and other seafood have long been considered to be good sources of protein with the added advantage of being low in saturated fat and high in healthy omega-3 fatty acids. However, scientists have learned that shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish contain levels of mercury that may harm an unborn child. By eating other types of fish in moderation you will get the health benefits of fish.

I'm not pregnant - so why should I be concerned about methylmercury?

If you regularly eat types of fish that are high in methylmercury, it can accumulate in your body over time. Methylmercury is removed from the body naturally, but it may take over a year for the levels to drop significantly. Thus, it may be present in a woman even before she becomes pregnant. This is one of the reasons why women who are trying to become pregnant should also avoid eating certain types of fish.

Table 1.State Contact Information

State	Contact Information
Delaware	Contact DE Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, 302-739-4590 www.dnrec.state.de.us DE Fish Advisory http://www.dnrec.state.de.us/fw/advisory.htm

District of Columbia	Contact the DC Department of Health, 202-555-2190 www.dchealth.dc.gov DC Fish Advisory http://dchealth.dc.gov/services/administration_offices/environmental/services2/fisheries_wildlife/licensing_phealthadvisory.shtm
Maryland	Contact the MD Department of Environment, Technical and Regulatory Services Administration, 410-537-3906, www.mde.state.md.us MD Fish Advisory http://www.mde.state.md.us/CitizensInfoCenter/Health/fish_advisories/index.asp
Pennsylvania	Contact PA Department of Environmental Protection 717-787-9637, www.dep.state.pa.us PA Fish Advisory http://www.iet.msu.edu/Regs/state/penn/pennfishadv.htm
Virginia	Contact the VA Department of Health, 804-786-1763, www.vdh.state.va.us VA Fish Advisory http://vdh.state.va.us/hhcontrol/fishing_advisories.htm
West Virginia	Contact the WV Bureau for Public Health, 304-558-2981, www.dep.state.wv.us WV Fish Advisory - http://www.wvdhhr.org/fish/

For further information about the risks of mercury in fish and shellfish call the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's food information line toll-free at 1-888-SEAFOOD or visit FDA's Food Safety Website www.cfsan.fda.gov. Additional information regarding contaminants in fish and health risks is available from EPA's Fish Advisories Website www.epa.gov/ost/fish/