

Food Safety

What You Need To Know About Fish And Mercury

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(NAPSA)—Health experts highly recommend eating fish and seafood: sources of lean, nutritious, quality protein. However, they disagree when it comes to fish and safe levels of mercury. Their advice may sometimes be confusing. Hopefully, this Q&A for fish-lovers simplifies things.

Is there a health risk to the general public linked to eating fish?

According to the FDA, no.

Is there an at-risk group? Yes, unborn babies and children under 7.

Are pregnant women and mothers of young children advised to stop eating/serving all fish to protect their babies? No. However, the FDA advises them to avoid shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tile fish. These long-lived fish are most likely to have higher levels of mercury.

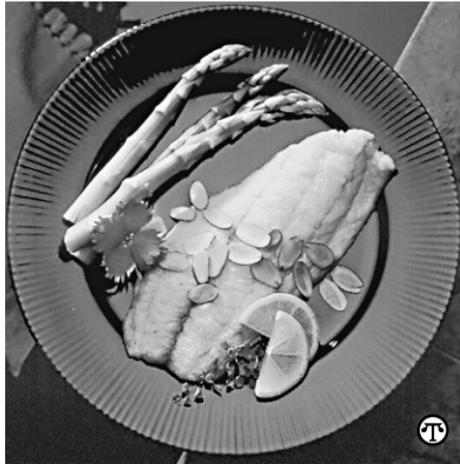
The FDA also encourages these women to limit other fish to two meals weekly, or two six-ounce servings.

Are there mercury hot spots that may affect other fish? Yes. States post advisories for sport fishermen on local waterbodies.

What is the risk? Babies may suffer neurological damage, birth defects or learning difficulties.

Also, if individuals eat particularly large quantities of overexposed fish for a long time, the fish-eaters may experience tingling in their extremities and problems with vision and hearing. These fish lovers will recover in six months if they stop eating overexposed fish.

What is a large quantity? On average, Americans eat one serving (six ounces) of fish and seafood



weekly. Could a daily serving of fish be considered a large quantity? Maybe.

What is a long time? Three years? Ten years? Even though experts don't have these answers, fish-lovers can stay tuned. A number of major studies are in progress.

What is overexposed fish? Mercury levels are measured in parts per million, ppm. The tolerable level is under debate. FDA scientists set it at 1.0 ppm—10 times lower than the lowest level ever found to affect humans. They've actually outlawed overexposed fish for interstate trade for a decade.

What is mercury? Mercury is a heavy metal expelled from soil and rock. Coal-fired power plants have significantly increased the release of mercury into the atmosphere. These emissions rain back down into lakes and rivers. There, bacteria can transform mercury into methylmercury a form potentially toxic to humans. Methylmercury is ingested by fish up the food chain where the oldest fish store the highest concentrations.

For more information and state links, go to www.LouisianaSeafood.com/mercury.