

MODERN RULES FOR **Eating Fish**

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Even if you were used to thinking of fish as a healthy food, you may have developed some doubts in recent years. There has been a lot of conflicting information about mercury levels and other safety issues concerning seafood.

Still, most experts agree that for healthy adults the pros of eating fish far outweigh the cons. The government has issued some special advice for pregnant women, nursing mothers, and small children, but encourages everyone not to miss out on the health benefits of fish. A balanced diet with two servings of fish a week is good for your heart and waistline. Fish provides high quality lean protein, omega 3 fatty acids, and other essential nutrients.

Let's clear up any confusion about how much fish to eat and how to enjoy it safely. Take a look at these facts.

Mercury in Fish

- 1. Understand mercury sources.**Mercury from natural sources and industrial pollution enters surface water where it becomes methylmercury. From there, fish absorb it while they're eating.
- 2. Select safer fish.**The level of mercury increases as it moves up the food chain. That's why big predatory fish like swordfish and shark have more mercury than smaller fare like shrimp and tilapia. ***Canned tuna has less mercury than tuna steaks, and canned light tuna has less mercury than albacore.***
- 3. Check local advisories.**The government publishes consumption advisories to

limit or avoid fish from certain areas due to mercury levels or other conditions. You can also consult your local health department.

4. **Take extra care if pregnant.** *The FDA and EPA advise pregnant and breastfeeding women to take simple precautions, including eating no more than 8 to 12 ounces of a variety of fish each week from choices that are lower in mercury.* They also recommend feeding children smaller portions.
5. **Talk with your doctor.** If you eat a lot of fish high in mercury, you may want to have your blood tested. Depending on the results, your doctor could recommend that you stop eating fish until the mercury leaves your body naturally over time.

Other Concerns about Fish

1. **Focus on freshness.** When shopping, look for fish that smells mild and feels firm. Ensure the flesh springs back when you press it. If you smell ammonia before or after cooking, consider it spoiled and throw it out.
2. **Eat farmed or wild.** It's usually fine to choose farmed or wild fish. The main exception is eating wild salmon to avoid possible PCBs in the farmed version.
3. **Cook light.** Broiling and grilling add far less calories than deep frying. For a fast and delicious meal, microwave fish in 5 minutes or less.
4. **Shop the freezer section.** Frozen fish sticks and fast food filets are usually low in mercury, but full of fat and excess calories. On the other hand, properly frozen fish can be just as nutritious as fresh.

5. **Dine out.**Seafood is often the tastiest way to stick to your diet in a restaurant. You may even discover recipes you can copy at home.

6. **Use omega 3 alternatives.**What if you dislike the taste of fish? ***Get your omega 3s from flaxseed, canola oil, wheat germ, and walnuts.***

7. **Stay informed.**For more information, visit the FDA's Food Safety Website or the EPA's Fish Advisory and Mercury Websites. You'll find additional details, especially if you're pregnant or planning to become pregnant.

Whatever you read on the internet, keep in mind that the EPA and the FDA say that mercury in seafood is not a significant risk for most adults. For healthy eating, eat fish twice a week, and choose the safest options.