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FISH CONSUMPTION IN PREGNANCY

What fish should I avoid eating during pregnancy?

SHARK, SWORDFISH, KING MACKEREL, TILE FISH

These fish contain high levels of mercury.

Which types of fish are safe in pregnancy and what amounts of these fish can I eat?

You may eat up to 12 ounces (two average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in methylmercury. The five most commonly eaten fish that are low in methylmercury are: SHRIMP, CANNED LIGHT TUNA SALMON, POLLOCK, and CATFISH.

Another commonly eaten fish, ALBACORE (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.

Is there any way I can find out about the methylmercury levels of fish in the local lakes?

If no advisory is available, eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, but don't consume any other fish during the week.

What is mercury?

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and can also be released into the air through industrial pollution. Mercury falls from the air and can accumulate in streams and oceans and is turned into methylmercury in the water. It is this type of mercury that can be harmful to your unborn baby and young child. Fish absorb the methylmercury as they feed in these waters and so it builds up in them. It builds up more in some types of fish and shellfish than others, depending on what the fish eat, which is why the levels vary.

If you regularly eat types of fish that are high in methylmercury, it can accumulate in your blood stream 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 the reason why women who are trying to become pregnant should also avoid eating certain types of fish.

Is there methylmercury in all fish?

Nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of methylmercury. However, larger fish that have lived longer have the highest levels of mercury because they've had more time to accumulate it. These large fish (SWORDFISH, SHARK, and KING MACKEREL AND TILEFISH) pose the greatest risk. Other types of fish and shellfish may be eaten in the amounts recommended by the FDA and the EPA.

I don't see the fish I eat in the advisory. What should I do?

If you want more information about the levels in the various types of fish you eat, see the FDA food safety website: www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/sea-mehg.html or the EPA website: www.epa.gov/ost/fish or call 1-888-SAFEFOOD.

What about fish sticks and fast food sandwiches?

Fish sticks and "fast-food" sandwiches are commonly made from fish that are low in mercury.

The advice about canned tuna is the advisory, but what's the advice about tuna steak?

Because tuna steak generally contains higher levels of mercury than canned light tuna, when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish, you may eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) _ per week.

What if I eat more than the recommended amount of fish and shellfish in a week?

One week's consumption of fish does not change the level of methylmercury in the body much at all. If you eat a lot of fish one week, you can cut back for the next week or two. Just make sure you average the recommended amount per week.

Where do I get information about the safety of fish caught recreationally by family or friends?

Before you go fishing, check your Fishing Regulations Booklet for information about recreationally caught fish. You can also contact your local health department for information about local advisories. You need to check local advisories because some kinds of fish and shellfish caught in your local waters may have higher or much lower than average levels of mercury. This depends on the levels of mercury the water in which the fish are caught. Those fish with much lower levels may be eaten more frequently and in larger amounts.