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Information for Pregnant Women, or Women Considering Pregnancy Regarding Mercury Content in Fish

Seafood can be an important part of a balanced diet for pregnant women. It is a good source of high quality protein and other nutrients and is low in fat.

However, some fish contain high levels of a form of mercury called methylmercury that can harm an unborn child's developing nervous system if eaten regularly. The FDA and the Environmental Protection Agency recommend the following guidelines for consuming seafood.

HOW DOES MERCURY GET INTO FISH?

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and it can also be released into the air through industrial pollution. Mercury falls from the air and can get into surface water, accumulating in streams and oceans. Bacteria in the water cause chemical changes that transform mercury into methylmercury that can be toxic. Fish absorb methylmercury from water as they feed on aquatic organisms.

HOW CAN I AVOID LEVELS OF MERCURY THAT COULD HARM MY UNBORN CHILD?

Nearly all fish contain trace amounts of methylmercury, which are not harmful to humans. However, long-lived, larger fish that feed on other fish accumulate the highest levels of methylmercury and pose the greatest risk to people who eat them regularly. You can protect your unborn child by not eating these large fish that can contain high levels of methylmercury:

Shark Swordfish King Mackerel Tilefish

While it is true that the primary danger from methylmercury in fish is to the developing nervous system of the unborn child, it is prudent for nursing mothers and young children not to eat these fish as well.

IS IT ALL RIGHT TO EAT OTHER FISH?

- Limit intake of these fish to no more than 12 ounces (which is about two to three servings) per week: Shellfish, salmon, flounder, sole, and cod, haddock and mahi mahi.
- Do not eat more than 6 ounces per week of cooked fish that was caught in local waters. If a local fish is consumed, then consumption of other fish during that week is discouraged.
- Limit consumption of canned tuna to one 6 ounce can of albacore (white) tuna or two 6 ounce cans of light tuna per week. We recommend pregnant women avoid eating any tuna steaks because large tuna can have high mercury levels. Canned tuna is made from smaller fish, which typically have lower levels of mercury.

WHAT IF I EAT MORE THAN 12 OUNCES OF FISH A WEEK?

There is no harm in eating more than 12 ounces of fish in one week as long as you don't do it on a regular basis. One week's consumption 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 the next week or two and be just fine. Just make sure you average no more than 12 ounces of fish a week.

Some kinds of fish are known to have much lower than average levels of methylmercury and can be safely eaten more frequently and in larger amounts. Contact your federal, state, or local health department or other appropriate food safety authority for specific consumption recommendations about fish caught or sold in your local area.

For information about the risks of Mercury in Seafood call toll-free 1 (888) SAFEFOOD - U. S. Food and Drug Administration Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Food Information Line 24 hours a day

Or Visit - FDA's Food Safety Website:
www.cfsan.fda.gov
Environmental Protection Agency:
www.epa.gov/ost/fish
Listings available on local area warnings