



MERCURY IN FISH

Fact Sheet

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Fish are very healthy food choices. However some types of fish have higher levels of mercury and should be eaten in moderation. This way, you gain all the benefits of eating fish with the least amount of risks for your health.

WHAT IS MERCURY?

Mercury is found in three different forms, the elemental (volatile liquid), organic, and the inorganic and can change from one form to another.

WHERE IS MERCURY FOUND?

NATURALLY OCCURRING

- ❖ Soil and rocks
- ❖ Lakes, streams and oceans

RELEASED IN THE ENVIRONMENT

- ❖ Pulp and paper processing
- ❖ Mining operations
- ❖ Burning garbage and fossil fuels

As mercury is released into the environment, it is carried long distances on wind currents and stays in the atmosphere a long time. From there, methyl mercury (the organic form) ends up in our water sources where it builds up in living things like fish that we then consume.

OUR BODIES ABSORB MERCURY FROM:

- ❖ Air and water pollution
- ❖ Amalgam dental fillings (No need to replace them but ask for future ones to be mercury-free)
- ❖ Food (mostly fish)

HOW MUCH MERCURY IS FOUND IN FISH? DEPENDS ON

1. How much mercury is found where the fish came from.
2. Its place in the food chain. For example, large predatory fish usually have higher amounts of methyl mercury than non-predatory fish that is lower down in the food chain.





HOW CAN MERCURY AFFECT ME?

EXTREME EXPOSURE

Health problems ranging from rashes to birth defects, even death.

LOW EXPOSURE

It's not sure yet but evidence suggests that it will affect infant IQ development and may cause heart problems.

Women of child bearing age, pregnant women and children under 12 years old should take special precautions to limit their intakes of methyl mercury because the toxic effects are highest in fetuses and young children.

If you are worried about mercury exposure, talk to someone at your health centre. You may also be able to tell your level of exposure by testing a sample of hair, blood or urine.

BENEFITS OF EATING FISH

- ❖ Excellent source of high-quality protein and omega-3 fatty acids (a good fat)
- ❖ Low in saturated fat (a bad fat)

Often, the many nutritional and socio-cultural benefits of eating fish in moderation outweigh the potential risks.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Check with your provincial or territorial authority on any advisory that may have been issued in your area.

The information given has been adapted from the following sites. Please visit them for more information.

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/specife.shtml>

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advisories-avis/2007/2007_14_e.html

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/envIRON/merc_e.html

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/pubs/home-domicile/2000_cp-pc_rev-exam/20_prog_enviro_contam_e.html

Call us Toll-Free at 1-866-960-5223 for more environmental health resources.

METHYL MERCURY LEVELS	FISH	RECOMMENDATION
HIGH	Shark	Consume no more than 1 meal per week or for pregnant women, women of child-bearing age and young children, no more than 1 meal a month
	Swordfish	
	Large tuna	
	Marine mammals	
MAY ALSO BE HIGH	Pike	Consume only occasionally (follow similar recommendation as above)
	Bass	
	Walleye	
	Rock Cod	
	Black Cod	
LOW	Char	Consume at least 2 Canada's Food Guide Servings each week of fish (1 Food Guide Serving is 75g, 2 ½ oz, 125 mL, or ½ cup)
	Herring	
	Mackerel	
	Salmon	
	Sardines	
	Rainbow trout	