

Questions and Answers
About
A Guide to Eating Fish for Women, Children and Families

1. Who is this guide for?

This guide can be used by everyone to make healthy fish choices. The advice for eating fish was developed specifically to protect the most sensitive populations such as pregnant or breastfeeding women, women who could become pregnant and children.

2. Why should I use this guide?

Toronto Public Health's *Guide to Eating Fish for Women, Children and Families* provides clear advice for eating fish. You will learn which fish are highest in omega-3 fats and lowest in mercury and how often you can eat them.

3. How is this guide different from other guides I've seen?

This guide is unique because it considers both environmental and health concerns that impact the fish you may want to buy. You can use the guide to find fish that is the lowest in mercury and highest in omega-3 fats. This guide will also help you avoid the fish that are caught or farmed in a way that is harmful to the environment. It provides helpful information for people who eat fish very frequently, such as every day. Also, this guide uses the Canada's Food Guide serving size of 75 grams (2.5 ounces) of fish.

4. What is a Canada's Food Guide Serving?

A Canada's Food Guide serving size of fish is 75 grams or 2.5 ounces. A typical fillet of fish purchased from the supermarket or served at a restaurant is usually much bigger (about 150 grams or five ounces). A drained can of tuna is 120 grams which is more than 1.5 Food Guide Servings. The advice in this guide is based on a serving size of 75 grams.

5. What does "unlimited" servings of fish mean for men, teenage boys and women 50+?

Men, teenage boys and women 50+ can safely eat unlimited servings of very low and low mercury fish. Unlimited servings means up to three servings of 75 grams a day (that is, a total of 225 grams daily) of a variety of fish species. For example, a person could have one serving for breakfast, lunch and dinner each or 225 grams at any single meal.

6. Do I need to be concerned about PCB levels in fish?

Toronto Public Health considered PCB levels in fish species when determining whether or not a species is safe to eat. If you follow the advice for eating fish in the guide and choose a variety of

species, you don't need to be concerned about PCBs. You can reduce levels of PCBs by removing the inner organs, fat and skin from fish and by cooking the fish. Baking, broiling, grilling or steaming fish are recommended cooking methods.

7. Why are there different fish species recommended in this guide compared to other guides I've seen?

This guide uses information from fish purchased in Canadian markets. Other guides may be based on information from United States markets. Sometimes the mercury levels are different between fish sold in Canada and the United States. The best information to guide Toronto residents is information on fish sold in Canada.

8. I like to eat a fish species that's not on the list. How can I find out about it?

Information on other fish species is available on Toronto Public Health's Fish and Mercury website or call Toronto Health Connection at 416-338-7600 and ask to speak to a Registered Dietitian.

9. My local grocery store doesn't label the species of fish. How do I know which category it falls under?

Sometimes fish are not labelled with all the information you need to make the best choice for your family. If you do not know the species of fish that you are buying, then you should eat that fish assuming the most restrictive advice for that fish type. For example, if you buy salmon and you do not know the species, then assume it is farmed Atlantic salmon.

10. Why is eating fish healthy and nutritious?

Fresh, canned and frozen fish and shellfish are high in protein, vitamin D and omega-3 fats. Two important omega-3 fats found in fish are EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid). EPA and DHA have been linked to improved heart health in adults. DHA supports brain growth and development in babies and young children.

11. Why should I eat a variety of fish?

Different fish species have different amounts of omega-3 fats as well as different mercury levels. Eating a variety of fish is the best way to maximize the benefits of eating fish while minimizing the risks from mercury and other contaminants. Eat a variety including shellfish, canned fish, smaller ocean fish or smaller freshwater fish.

12. Which foods contain omega-3 fats?

Oily or fatty fish, such as salmon, Atlantic mackerel, anchovies, herring, sardines and rainbow trout, have the highest amount of EPA and DHA. These two types of omega-3 fats (EPA and DHA) have been shown to reduce heart disease. Plant-based foods are the best sources of ALA. These include flaxseed, walnuts, wheat germ, soybean and canola oils and a lesser amount is found in green leafy vegetables (such as spinach, kale and collard greens).

Food products such as yogurt, milk, bread, orange juice and eggs have been enriched with omega-3 fats. Omega-3 enriched eggs are produced by hens fed a special diet enriched with ground flaxseed.

13. Which fish are high in omega-3 fats, low in mercury and eco friendly (caught or farmed in a way that does not harm the environment)?

Fish that are high in omega-3 fats, low in mercury and caught or farmed in a way that does not harm the environment are Arctic char, Atlantic mackerel, herring, Rainbow trout and sardines.

14. How much fish can pregnant and breastfeeding women eat?

Pregnant or breastfeeding women and women who could become pregnant, including teenage girls, can safely eat two 75 g servings of cooked fish **a day** from the “Safe to Eat Every Day” (very low mercury) list.

Pregnant or breastfeeding women and women who could become pregnant, including teenage girls, can safely eat four 75 g servings of cooked fish **a week** from the “Safe to Eat Often” (low mercury) list.

Pregnant or breastfeeding women and women who could become pregnant, including teenage girls, can also safely eat two to four 75 g servings of cooked fish **a month** in the “Safe to Eat Sometimes” (medium mercury) list.

Pregnant or breastfeeding women and women who could become pregnant, including teenage girls, should avoid or rarely eat (**less than** one serving a month) high mercury fish.

15. I am pregnant and I just ate swordfish (a high mercury fish). Did I harm my baby?

No. Toronto Public Health recommends that pregnant women eat **less than** one serving of high mercury fish a month. For the rest of this month and next month, eat low mercury fish. For the rest of your pregnancy, follow the advice for eating fish in the guide.

16. My baby is younger than one year old. Can I feed my baby fish?

Toronto Public Health and Health Canada recommend exclusive breastfeeding for six months with no other solids and liquids and continued breastfeeding for up to two years and beyond. If there is no history of allergies, children 6 to 12 months can be given fish in smaller amounts using the guide to make healthy fish choices for children. If there is a history of allergies, talk to your doctor or Registered Dietitian before introducing fish to your child. For more information, call Toronto Health Connection at 416-338-7600 and ask to speak to a Registered Dietitian.

17. Is it safe to eat raw fish during pregnancy?

Health Canada recommends that pregnant women should avoid eating raw fish and raw shellfish, especially raw oysters and clams. They may contain bacteria that can cause serious illness. Raw fish is used to prepare certain kinds of sushi, such as maki, sashimi and nigiri. Be sure to ask if your sushi is made with raw fish.

18. What is the difference between light and white canned tuna?

Canned tuna labelled “light” includes species such as Skipjack, Yellowfin and Tongol. Light tuna is low in mercury because it is made from smaller tuna fish.

White canned tuna is made from Albacore tuna that has a whiter flesh than light tuna. White tuna is higher in mercury because it is made from a bigger tuna fish.

Choose “white” or Albacore tuna less often.

19. What is the healthiest way to cook or prepare fish?

Baking, broiling, grilling or steaming fish are recommended cooking methods.

20. Why should I care about ecological concerns when choosing fish?

Toronto Public Health supports sustainable food production. Poor fisheries management can result in habitat damage, threats to other aquatic life and overfishing. Fish species in the “▼ Eco Unfriendly” sections of the guide may be caught or farmed in a way that is harmful to the environment. For more information on making the best environmental fish choices refer to www.seachoice.org.

21. I am an adult in my fifties. Do I have to worry about mercury in fish?

Although mercury in small amounts can cause harm to the fetus and baby, it takes much higher levels of mercury to cause harm to an adult. For this reason adult men, women over 50 and even teenage boys do not have to worry as much about mercury in fish as children, women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or could become pregnant, including teenage girls. For heart health, adults fifty years and older would benefit from eating two or more 75 g servings of low mercury, high omega-3 fat fish (marked with ♥) each week. These fish include salmon, Arctic char, Atlantic mackerel, herring, rainbow trout or other fish on the “Safe to Eat Every Day” and “Safe to Eat Often” lists. Adults fifty years and older and teenage boys should not eat more than one serving of high mercury fish weekly.