



What are the health benefits of eating fish?

Fish provide a high protein, low fat diet which is low in saturated fats. Fish may have substantial health benefits when they replace a high fat source of protein in the diet.

The American Heart Association recommends two servings of fish per week as part of a healthy diet.



Should I stop eating fish?

No! Fish are an excellent source of protein and other nutrients.



Where can I get more information?

▶ Utah Department of Health
Environmental Epidemiology Program
PO Box 142104
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114
801-538-6191
www.health.utah.gov/epi

Utah Department of Environmental Quality
Division of Water Quality
288 N 1460 W
Salt Lake City, Utah 84116
801-538-6146
www.waterquality.utah.gov

Utah Division of Wildlife Resources
PO Box 146301
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114
801-538-4700
www.wildlife.utah.gov/fishing

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaq.html

Environmental Protection Agency's Fish Advisories
www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish



Find out what you need to know about Mercury in Fish

801-538-6191
www.health.utah.gov/epi

August 2005

What is Mercury?

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and can also be released into the air through industrial pollution. Once released into the air mercury can travel long distances and can build up in bodies of water. Fish absorb the mercury as they feed in polluted waters. Over time the amount of mercury in fish builds up. Mercury builds up more in some types of fish and shellfish than others. The levels of mercury in all fish in a lake or one species can vary greatly.

How does mercury get into fish?

Metals get into fish from pollution in the water and sediment where they live. Larger fish feed on smaller fish, which causes metals to concentrate in the larger fish. Larger, older fish contain more mercury than smaller, younger fish.

Can mercury make me sick?

The mercury found in fish may not make you sick right away.

- Eating too much fish containing mercury can harm your nervous system.
- Mercury poisoning may cause tremors, vision or hearing problems, tingling or



numbness in the mouth, hands, or feet, as well as damage to kidneys.

- Young children, unborn and breast-fed babies have a higher risk of injury from mercury since their nervous systems are still forming.
- Too much mercury may affect a child's behavior and lead to learning problems later in life.
- Mercury can also harm older children and adults, but it takes larger amounts.
- Usually, the harmful effects can be corrected if a person stops eating fish that contain high levels of mercury.
- Children and unborn babies, may suffer permanent damage from mercury poisoning.

Can mercury in fish be removed?

Mercury cannot be removed through cooking or cleaning. There are no special cleaning or cooking methods that will decrease the amount of mercury in fish. This is because mercury is stored in the meat or fillet of the fish instead of in the fat or skin.

Remember the following tips when eating fish:

1. Eat smaller and younger fish.
2. Eat a variety of cooked fish and seafood.
3. Eat fish from water bodies that do not have fish consumption advisories.

Don't forget...

Mercury is more harmful to babies and children since their nervous systems are still forming.

Can I tell if a fish contains mercury?

No! Fish that contain mercury do not smell, look, or taste different than other fish.

National Fish Advisory

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are advising women who are pregnant or may become pregnant, nursing mothers, and young children to avoid eating fish that contain high levels of mercury, such as:

- shark
- swordfish
- king mackerel
- tilefish

Up to 12 ounces (2 average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish can be eaten. The most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are:

- shrimp
- canned light tuna
- salmon
- pollock
- catfish.

Another commonly eaten fish, albacore ("white") tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna. Up to 6 ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna can be eaten per week.

