



Healthy Eating: Guidelines for Eating Fish with Higher Mercury Levels

Canada's Food Guide (CFG) recommends that adults and children who are 2 years of age or older, eat at least 2 servings of fish each week. Fish provides many nutrients such as protein, selenium, vitamin D, magnesium and iron. Fish is also low in saturated fat and provides healthy omega-3 fats, which are good for your brain and heart. Omega-3 fats are particularly important for brain and eye development in babies and children.

One Canada's Food Guide serving of fish is equal to:

- 75 grams;
- 2 ½ ounces;
- 125 mL; or
- ½ cup.

While there are health benefits of eating fish regularly, it is important to know that mercury is present in various levels in different types of fish. Depending on the amount of mercury you eat, it can be harmful to your health.

Why is there mercury in fish?

There are natural sources of mercury found in the environment, but human activity such as mining, burning of waste and hydroelectric dams have increased the amount of mercury found in soil and water. Fish absorb this mercury, which your body then absorbs when you eat the fish.

The fish highest in mercury are usually larger fish that eat smaller fish. Cleaning, preparing or cooking fish will not remove or reduce any amount of mercury.

How is mercury harmful to my health?

Mercury may have harmful effects on the nervous system, including the brain. The brain is most sensitive when it is growing and developing. Pregnant and breastfeeding women, babies and

children are the most at risk from eating fish with higher levels of mercury. Health Canada recommends you eat fish that is low in mercury and limit intake of fish that is higher in mercury.

Which fish have higher levels of mercury?

Fish with higher levels of mercury include:

- fresh or frozen tuna;
- shark;
- marlin;
- swordfish;
- escolar; and
- orange roughy.

Note: Canadian albacore tuna (fresh, frozen and canned) has been well tested for mercury and is considered safe to eat. The mercury level in these fish is lower than other albacore tunas. To find Canadian albacore tuna, look for the statement "Product of Canada" on the label.

How much fish is safe to eat?

For fish that have higher levels of mercury, it is recommended that you limit the amount that you and your family eat. This table shows the recommended serving limits for different age groups.

Your Age	Serving Limit (Fresh or frozen tuna, shark, marlin, swordfish, escolar, and orange roughy)
Children 6 to 12 months	40 grams (1 ¼ ounces) per month (approximately ½ CFG serving a month)
Children 1 to 4 years	75 grams (2 ½ ounces) per month (1 CFG serving a month)
Children 5 to 11 years	125 grams (4 ounces) per month (less than 2 CFG servings a month)

Women of childbearing age, including pregnant and breastfeeding women	150 grams (5 ounces) per month (2 CFG servings a month)
Men (ages 12 and older) and Women after childbearing years	150 grams (5 ounces) per week (2 CFG servings per week)

Canned albacore (white) tuna is also higher in mercury, but not as high in mercury as those fish listed above. However, Health Canada recommends that you limit the amount of canned albacore tuna that you eat. The following table shows how much white tuna is safe to eat for different age groups.

Your Age	Serving Limit (Canned albacore tuna) *
Children 6 to 12 months	40 grams (1 ¼ ounces) per week (approximately ½ CFG serving a week)
Children 1 to 4 years	75 grams (2 ½ ounces) per week (1 CFG serving a week)
Children 5 to 11 years	150 grams (5 ounces) per week (2 CFG servings a week)
Women of childbearing age, including pregnant and breastfeeding women	300 grams (10 ounces) per week (4 CFG servings a week)
Men (ages 12 and older) and Women after childbearing years	No limit

*Canned albacore tuna (labelled with ‘Product of Canada’) has no serving limits.

Can I eat fish caught by family and friends?

The risk of mercury in lakes and streams in British Columbia is normally low, however, mercury levels are not usually tested. Testing is done when the risk of contamination is higher, such as in areas where there are reservoirs or natural mercury deposits. As of 2013, only 3 lakes in B.C. have mercury advisories. These advisories are for lake trout and

bull trout in Jack of Clubs, Pinchi and Williston Lakes.

Can I eat other types of fish not on the list?

Yes. There are no recommended limits placed on any fish sold in Canada in terms of mercury levels, except for those listed in this HealthLinkBC File. There is no limit placed on the amount of canned light tuna including the skipjack, yellowfin, and tongol species.

For More Information

Canada’s Food Guide recommends a balanced diet that includes choosing a variety of different foods, including fish. For more information on choosing a balanced diet, visit Canada’s Food Guide at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php.

For more information on mercury and fish, visit Health Canada’s web page on Mercury in Fish at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/secureit/chem-chim/viron/mercur/merc_fish_qa-poisson_qr-eng.php.

For more information on freshwater fishing regulations and alerts, visit the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations Fish and Wildlife website at www.env.gov.bc.ca/fw/fish/regulations/ or call 250-387-9711.

For more nutrition information, call 8-1-1 to speak with a registered dietitian.

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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