



Food Facts Highlight: Hook into Healthy Fish

The calendar says that spring is here, and many people have begun to look to spring-time activities that they enjoy – so fishing naturally comes to mind! It's a good time to revisit the recommendations for consumption of fresh-water fish harvested in Wisconsin, as well as current FDA recommendations on consumption of popular salt-water

fish such as tuna. (April 2005)

Reel in the facts from the DNR about contaminants in fresh-water fish in Wisconsin . The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) updates their fish consumption advisory for Wisconsin waters every year. <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/pages/consumption/> Here are the highlights.

Mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are the contaminants of greatest concern in Wisconsin's fish. To reduce people's exposure to these contaminants, the state issues advice to help individuals choose what fish to keep as well as how often and how much fish to eat. This information is not intended to discourage consumers from eating fish, but should be used as a guide to eating fish low in contaminants. Extensive information is available that details fish consumption advisories for all Wisconsin waters.

Choose Wisely: A Health Guide for Eating Fish in Wisconsin (20 pages)

The fish consumption advisory includes the following general recommendations:
Safe Eating Guidelines for most of Wisconsin 's inland (non-Great Lakes) waters.

Women of childbearing years, nursing mothers, all children under 15 may eat:*

- 1 meal per week: Bluegill, sunfish, black crappie, white crappie, yellow perch or bullheads, and
- 1 meal per month: Walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, channel catfish, flathead catfish, white sucker, drum, burbot, sauger, sturgeon, carp, white bass, rock bass or other species.*

*(*Muskie should not be eaten by this group of people due to high mercury content.)*

Men, and women beyond their childbearing years may eat:

- Unlimited amounts: Bluegill, sunfish, black crappie, white crappie, yellow perch, or bullheads, and
- 1 meal per week: Walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, channel catfish, flathead catfish, or other species.

Additional restrictive advice is necessary for some waters where fish have been found to contain higher levels of mercury: see **Hook into Healthy Fish** (2 pages) <http://dnr.wi.gov/fish/pages/consumption/> The DNR encourages all Wisconsin residents to follow these common sense guidelines so that the benefits of eating fish will outweigh the health risks.

What about mercury in fish and shellfish from non-Wisconsin waters? Much of the fish that we eat comes from the grocery store, either fresh/frozen or canned fish and shellfish, and not from Wisconsin waters. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) offers the following fish-consumption advice for women who might become pregnant, women who are pregnant, nursing mothers and young children:



Fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet. Fish and shellfish contain high-quality protein and other essential nutrients, are low in saturated fat, and contain omega-3 fatty acids. A well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fish and shellfish can contribute to heart health and children's proper growth and development. So, women and young children in particular should include fish or shellfish in their diets due to the many nutritional benefits.

However, nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of mercury. For most people, the risk from mercury by eating fish and shellfish is not a health concern. Yet, some fish and shellfish contain higher levels of mercury that may harm an unborn baby or young child's developing nervous system. The risks from mercury in fish and shellfish depend on the amount of fish and shellfish eaten and the levels of mercury in the fish and shellfish. Therefore, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are advising women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children to avoid some types of fish and eat fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.

By following three recommendations for selecting and eating fish or shellfish, women and young children will receive the benefits of eating fish and shellfish and be confident that they have reduced their exposure to the harmful effects of mercury.

Safe Consumption Guidelines for Pregnant Women, Women of Child-Bearing Age and Young Children Consuming Salt-Water Fish:

- **Do not eat** Shark, Swordfish, King Mackerel, or Tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.
- **Eat up to 12 ounces a week** (2 average meals) of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury. Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish. [Note: Another commonly eaten fish, canned albacore ("white") tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna. So, when choosing meals, canned 'white' or albacore tuna may be consumed in one average meal per week (6 ounces). Tuna steak should also be limited to one meal per week.]
- **Check local advisories** about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in your local lakes, rivers, and coastal areas. If no advice is available, eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, but don't consume any other fish during that week.

Follow these same recommendations when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but serve smaller portions. The FDA's guidelines are available in **English & Spanish**: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/admehg3b.html>

What about fish sticks and fast food sandwiches? Fish sticks and other prepared fish items are most often prepared from pollock and other fish that are low in mercury. These items could be consumed as part of a healthy diet (2 average meals per week).

What about canned tuna? Canned tuna is found in two forms: canned light tuna (less expensive) and canned white (albacore) tuna (more expensive). Canned light tuna can be consumed in up to two average meals per week, perhaps as a tuna casserole or tuna-salad sandwiches. Canned 'white' tuna should be consumed no more than once per week.

What if I have already eaten tuna twice this week? Can I go out on Friday evening for a fish-fry where they are serving walleye? One week's consumption does not change the level of mercury in the body very much. However, individuals who consume a lot of fish caught in Wisconsin waters should limit consumption of other fish and vice versa. If you eat a lot of fish one week, you can cut back for the next week or two. Just make sure you average no more than the recommended amount per week.