

Eat Fish for Your Health

There are many healthy reasons to eat fish. Fish has good-quality protein and vitamins and minerals. It is also low in saturated fat and calories. Eating fish once or twice a week in place of beef and pork can lower your intake of total and saturated fats.

The fat in certain fish like salmon, trout, herring, mackerel, sardines and tuna gives us healthy omega-3 fatty acids. These fatty acids in oily fish help keep your heart healthy and reduce stroke risk. They do this by lowering blood fats called triglycerides as well as artery-damaging inflammation. There is good evidence that eating fish during pregnancy may improve brain and nerve development of the baby. It also contributes to eye health across the lifespan.

Health risks linked with eating fish include exposure to mercury or other contaminants in certain fish. It is generally believed that the benefits of eating fish, in most cases, outweigh the risks. Choosing the fish listed in the What Fish are Better Choices section can help reduce any risk.



Handle Fish With Care

Fish is easy to prepare. However, following a few simple steps is important for both taste and safety. Handle fish as little and as gently as possible before, during and after cooking for best texture and appearance.

Whether you buy or catch your fish, cook it within two days or freeze it immediately. If frozen, thaw it in the refrigerator overnight. Rinse it in cold water, drain and pat dry.

Overcooked fish can be dry and unappealing. However, eating raw and undercooked fish raises food safety risks. This is especially true for pregnant women, children, the elderly and those with poor immune function. To be safe, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration says to always cook fish to an internal temperature of 145° F or until the fish flakes easily and is opaque.

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Web Sites

2004 Consumer Advisory (FDA & EPA)
<http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/news/2004/NEW01038.html>

American Heart Association
<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4632>

Nevada Division of Environmental Protection
<http://ndep.nv.gov/mercury/index.htm>

U.S. EPA Fish Advisories
<http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish/>

U.S. EPA Mercury
<http://www.epa.gov/mercury/advisories.htm>

References

National Academy of Sciences, Nesheim, M.C. and A.L. Yaktine, eds. 2007. Seafood Choices: Balancing Benefits and Risks. National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Executive Summary, posted at www.nap.edu.

U.S. EPA and U.S. FDA. 2003. FDA and EPA Development of a Joint Advisory for Methyl mercury-containing Fish Consumption for Women of Childbearing Age and Children. Posted at www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/mehg703.html

U.S. EPA. 2004. What You Need to Know About Mercury in Fish and Shellfish. EPA-823-R-04-005.

U.S. FDA. 2006. Fresh and Frozen Seafood – Selecting and Serving it Safely. Available at www.cfsan.fda.gov/~lrd/seasafe_html#eat.

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Eating Fish: Making Healthy Choices



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Mercury in Fish: What Is the Issue?

Mercury is found naturally in soil, air and water. Certain industries also release mercury into the environment. These include the production of cement and coal-fired power and mining. However, humans are exposed to mercury at levels of concern primarily by eating fish. Certain fish types, including fish that are long-lived or larger, and fish that feed on other fish, tend to build up the most mercury.

In most cases, the risk of health problems from eating fish containing mercury is low. However, mercury is a concern for women who are trying to become pregnant, who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and for small children. Mercury can be passed from the pregnant mother to her baby. It can also pass into her breast milk. Mercury can harm a baby's or young child's brain and cause learning problems.

To Limit Mercury

- Choose fish that are lower in mercury
- Do not eat fish that are high in mercury
- Eat smaller fish
- Eat a variety of lower-mercury fish
- Avoid large fish servings if you eat fish often (more than twice a week)



What Fish Are Better Choices?

Fish that are high in omega-3 fatty acids and low in mercury will provide the most health benefit. These lists show types of fish that are lower in mercury but high in the healthy omega-3 fatty acids (“Best choices”), “Other low-mercury choices,” and “High-mercury fish to avoid” that pregnant women and small children should not eat.

Best Choices	Other Low-mercury Choices	High-mercury Fish to Avoid
Herring Salmon Sardines Trout Canned chunk light tuna	Catfish Flounder or sole Shrimp Tilapia	King mackerel Shark Swordfish Tilefish White albacore tuna or tuna steak— Limit amounts according to the recommendations at left

How Much Mercury Is in Nevada Fish?

Nevada is a great place to fish, with more than 200 lakes and reservoirs and 600 streams and rivers. However, certain types of fish from a few locations are higher in mercury than is considered safe. The Nevada State Health Division advisory shown below applies to anyone who eats fish from the water bodies listed. Check the Web site below before going fishing, as the advisories may change.

Water Body	Species of Fish	Recommended Fish Meals/Month (1 meal = 6 ounces cooked weight)
Lahontan Reservoir	All	DO NOT EAT ANY
Carson River, Dayton downstream to Lahontan	All	DO NOT EAT ANY
Big and Little Washoe Lakes	White bass Carp	DO NOT EAT ANY 1 meal/month*
Rye Patch Reservoir	Walleye Wiper White crappie, carp, yellow perch, green sunfish, brown bullhead	DO NOT EAT ANY DO NOT EAT ANY 4 meals/month*
Chimney Dam Reservoir	Walleye Carp, white crappie Yellow perch	DO NOT EAT ANY 1 meal/month* 2 meals/month*
Comins Lake	Northern pike Largemouth bass Rainbow trout	DO NOT EAT ANY DO NOT EAT ANY 1 meal/month*

Recommendations from Nevada State Health Division; samples taken by Nevada Dept. of Wildlife. See www.ndow.org/fish/health/index.shtm for more information..

* If you eat any one of these, do not eat any others in the same month.

How Much Fish Should I Eat?

Women who are pregnant, may become pregnant or are breastfeeding

Fish is a healthy addition to the diet of a pregnant woman. It helps her meet her increased nutrition needs. The fatty acids in fish ensure healthy eye and brain development of the baby and young child.

Recommendations:

- Eat two fish meals a week, each about 3 ounces cooked weight, or up to a safe total of 12 ounces a week.
- This can include up to 6 ounces of white albacore tuna or tuna steak each week
- Do not eat shark, swordfish, tilefish, king mackerel and any raw fish.
- Check and follow local advisories about the safety of locally caught fish, or limit to one fish meal a week total.

Children up to 12 years of age

Recommendations: These are the same as above, except that a child's serving size may be smaller as age-appropriate, up to a safe total of 12 ounces a week.

Adolescents and adult men and women (who will not become pregnant)

Recommendations for heart health:

- Eat two fish meals a week, or up to 12 ounces cooked weight a week.
- If more than two servings (or more than 12 ounces) a week are eaten, select a variety of types of fish.