

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0504

September 27, 2000

Ms. Diane E. Thompson  
Good Contact:IND/Drug Approval  
Joy Stevens  
Rockville, Maryland

**INQUIRY FROM:** Jane M. Hightower

**RE:** the presence of mercury in fish

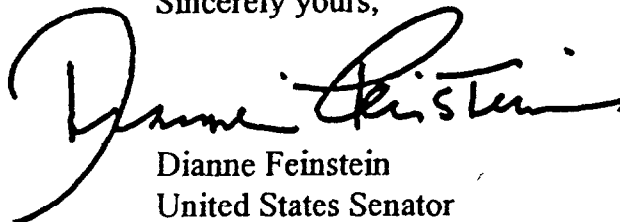
Dear Ms. Thompson:

I am forwarding the attached constituent inquiry regarding the presence of mercury in fish for your review. I believe that my constituent would benefit from your response to the specific issues raised in the enclosed letter.

I would appreciate it if you would return your response to me as quickly as possible so that I can share the information with my constituent. Should you have any questions, please contact my Washington, D.C. office at (202) 224-3841.

With warmest personal regards.

Sincerely yours,



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

DF:jbo

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**JANE M. HIGHTOWER MD**

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San Francisco, CA 94115  
(415) 923-3025

August 17, 2000

Senator Dianne Feinstein  
331 Hart Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein;

I have recently discovered elevated mercury levels in my patients. The source of this mercury is through the consumption of large predator fish such as swordfish, Ahi, halibut, mackerel, eel, and shark. These fish are amongst the most popular fish with many people in the bay area of San Francisco. They also can contain the highest mercury levels in fish sold in America.

My patients had been suffering from symptoms such as fatigue, muscle aches, trouble thinking, headache, gastrointestinal upset, hair loss. Some have incurred large health bills in their pursuit of a cause of their symptoms. The patients are recovering, after being off of fish and lowering their mercury levels.

I have been working diligently to get the word out to other patients, and health care practitioners. I have informed our obstetrics department, as the developing fetus can have permanent brain damage if the mothers were to have elevated mercury. Some of these effects will not be seen until the child is six or seven years old with lowered IQ and difficulty with motor skills.

The FDA has an advisory that no one seems to know about. A pregnant woman should not eat more than one serving of swordfish per month. There are many problems with this. The FDA "action level" for allowable mercury in fish is 1 mcg/g. According to Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, 1/3 of swordfish, 1/3 of shark, and 4% of tuna is over 1mcg/g. When he wrote a letter to the FDA, they in turn stated that they will no longer be monitoring these fish. His state and three others have adopted a zero tolerance and have issued warnings to pregnant women and sensitive individuals to not eat fish which has been known to be high in mercury, and lists them for the public.

California has had an increase in Autism and developmental disabilities by 567%. I am currently discussing my findings with a Pediatric neurologist who will take diet histories on the mothers of his autistic patients. Autism apparently affects upper middle and upper income children of unknown etiology. Swordfish and other large predator fish are eaten more by the affluent. I will keep you informed if we begin to see a correlation.

I did notify appropriate state health officials, but they are using data from the 1970's. Much of the work done on mercury in fish has been done in the last 5 years.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter, feel free to call.

Sincerely,

*Jane M. Hightower, MD*

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