



<http://www.womenshealth.gov>

800-994-9662

TDD: 888-220-5446

# Fish Facts

## PRINT-AND-GO GUIDE

### *Fish Facts for Women Who Are Pregnant or Breastfeeding*

Fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet. They are a great source of protein and heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids for people of all ages. The nutrients in seafood are important for unborn babies, as well as for infants and young children. Research shows that omega-3 fatty acids eaten by pregnant women may aid in babies' brain and eye development. Also, some researchers believe depression in women during and after pregnancy may be related to not eating enough fish.

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should eat at least 8 ounces and up to 12 ounces of a variety of seafood per week to get the health benefits. Unfortunately, some pregnant and nursing women do not eat any fish because they worry about mercury in seafood. Mercury is a metal that, at high levels, can harm the brain of your unborn baby even before he or she is conceived. Yet many types of seafood have little or no mercury at all. So your risk of mercury exposure depends on the amount and type of seafood you eat.

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding can safely eat a large variety of cooked seafood, but should not eat a few kinds of fish that contain high levels of mercury. Keep in mind that removing all fish from your diet will rob both you and your baby of all the nutritional benefits that seafood provides, including important omega-3 fatty acids. To reach the recommended amount of 8 to 12 ounces per week while limiting exposure to mercury, follow these tips:

- **Eat a variety of cooked\* seafood that contains little or no mercury, such as these types that are higher in omega-3 fatty acids:**
  - Salmon
  - Anchovies
  - Herring
  - Sardines
  - Pacific oysters
  - Trout
  - Atlantic and Pacific mackerel (not King mackerel)

*\* Don't eat uncooked fish or shellfish (such as clams, oysters, scallops), which includes refrigerated uncooked seafood labeled nova-style, lox, kippered, smoked, or jerky. Uncooked seafood may contain bacteria that are harmful during pregnancy.*



<http://www.womenshealth.gov>

800-994-9662

TDD: 888-220-5446

- **Limit white (albacore) tuna to 6 ounces (about 1 serving) per week.**
- **Do not eat these fish, which are high in mercury:**
  - Swordfish
  - Tilefish
  - King mackerel
  - Shark
- **Check before eating fish caught in local waters.** State health departments have guidelines on fish from local waters. Or get local fish advisories from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Do not eat fish from local waters unless your state health department says that doing so is safe. If you are unsure about the safety of a fish that you have already eaten, don't eat any other fish that week.
- **Eat a variety of cooked seafood rather than just a few types.**

Foods supplemented with DHA/EPA (such as “omega-3 eggs”) and prenatal vitamins supplemented with DHA are other sources of the type of omega-3 fatty acids found in seafood.

Fish Facts was reviewed by:

Rafael Perez-Escamilla, Ph.D.

Professor of Epidemiology & Public Health Director, Office of Community Health  
Yale School of Public Health

Content last updated August 22, 2011.