

Mercury Contamination in Fish
Summary by P. Anthony Chapdelaine, Jr., MD, MSPH 12/12/01

The following recommendations come from the Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org), and are more comprehensive and accurate than the FDA, EPA or National Academy of Sciences (NAS) recommendations. The NAS (2000) stated that some children of women exposed in utero to methylmercury are at risk of being a group who "have to struggle to keep up in school and who might require remedial classes of special education." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2001) said that data showed that about ten percent of US women (7 million) have blood mercury levels above the dose that would put a fetus at risk of brain and nervous system damage.

Mercury in fish: 40 tons of mercury released into US air annually, mostly from coal-fired plants (completely unregulated) works up food chain into fish. (Mercury dental amalgams are another major source of mercury toxicity.)

The following fish have the highest levels of methylmercury, and are to be avoided during pregnancy, by nursing women, or by women considering pregnancy follows. (Acutally, these fish should be avoided by everyone else because of accumulation of methlymercury.):

Tuna steaks	Walleye	Swordfish	Sea Bass
White croaker	Pike	Tilefish	King Mackerel
Oysters (Gulf of Mexico)	Largemouth Bass	Marlin	Halibut

The following fish should be eaten no more than one meal per month by pregnant or nursing women (only one of these per month): Everyone else should limit the quantity consumed:

Canned Tuna	Lake Whitefish	Mahi Mahi	Channel Catfish (wild)
Blue Mussels	Blue Crab (Gulf of Mexico)	Eastern Oyster	Salmon from the Great Lakes
Cod	Pollock		

The following are the least contaminated with methlmercury are therefore relatively safe for pregnant women:

Trout (farmed)*	Catfish (farmed)*	Fish Sticks
Summer Flounder	Croaker	Blue Crab (mid-Atlantic)
Haddock	Sardines	North Pacific Salmon

*The farmed trout and catfish, however, are grain-fed and have little omega-3 nutritional value, and the chance of having higher levels of pesticides from farm runoff. The fish sticks are breaded with non-nutritional substances.