

Fish: What Kind Should I Eat?

A Guide for Expectant and Breastfeeding Women, Infants and Young Children



Both the benefits and the dangers of eating fish are often in the news. Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide recommends that we eat more fish – **at least** two Food Guide Servings each week. The Food Guide also tells us to limit our exposure to mercury from certain types of fish.

If you're a bit confused about what kind of fish to eat this fact sheet will clear up any questions you may have about the safety of eating fish for expectant and breastfeeding women, infants and young children.

The Benefits of Eating Fish

Fish is a great source of protein and other nutrients such as vitamin D, zinc and iron. What's more, it is one of the few key dietary sources of beneficial omega-3 fats.

Omega-3 Fats: Essential for Good Health

There are three different types of omega-3 fatty acids:

- ALA for alpha-linolenic acid
- EPA for eicosapentaenoic acid
- DHA for docosahexaenoic acid

Of the three types, DHA is the most important omega-3 fat.

To ensure you get enough DHA omega-3 fat:

- Eat **at least** two food guide servings of fish each week

If you don't eat fish:

- Use omega-3 eggs
- Eat nuts and seeds such as walnuts, flaxseed and flaxseed oil
- Use canola oil and non-hydrogenated canola oil margarine
- Choose omega-3 fortified foods such as omega-3 yogurt, cheese and milk

DHA Omega-3 Fat: Very Important During Pregnancy & Childhood

For expectant and breastfeeding women, infants and young children, DHA is vital for the proper development of the brain, nerves, and eye tissue of your baby. If DHA is lacking during these important times, a baby's learning ability and vision can be affected.

The Risks of Eating Fish

Eating fish is not without risk. Some species may contain mercury, a strong toxin found in the muscle tissue of fish and shellfish.

Mercury is dangerous because it builds up in human tissue, particularly in unborn children. Unborn babies, infants and young children exposed to too much mercury can suffer from permanent nerve damage and experience delays in learning, walking and speech.

The Good News

The good news is that only six species of fish, usually big predatory fish, contain dangerous levels of mercury. Women who are expecting or breastfeeding, infants and young children can still enjoy the benefits of eating fish by following these recommendations.





Fish TO Eat

All Canadians should eat **at least** two Food Guide Servings of fish each week. One food guide serving of fish is 2 ½ oz (75 g).

Vary the type of fish you eat and eat as much as you like of lower mercury fish. Some common examples are:

- anchovy
- Atlantic mackerel
- blue crab
- capelin
- char
- clams
- cod
- flounder
- haddock
- hake
- herring
- lake white fish
- mullet
- mussels
- oyster
- pollock
- salmon
- sardines
- shrimp
- smelt
- sole
- tilapia
- trout.

Fish to Limit

Canadians who like to consume: fresh and frozen tuna, shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy and escolar can continue to do so, but should limit their consumption to the amounts shown below.

General Population	Specified Women*	Children 5-11 years	Children 1-4 years
5 oz (150 g) per week	5 oz (150 g) per month	4 ½ oz (125 g) per month	2 ½ oz (75 g) per month

Other types of fish should be chosen to make up the rest of the recommended two Food Guide servings per week.

***Specified women** are those who are or may become pregnant or are breastfeeding.



What about Canned Tuna?

Canned tuna deserves special mention because it is a popular choice of fish for Canadians. There are no restrictions on eating canned light tuna because it is made of smaller tuna species that have less mercury.

If you do choose to eat albacore (white) tuna, which is higher in mercury, you should limit your intake to no more than:

Specified Women*	Children 5-11 years old	Children 1-4 years old
10 oz (300 g) per week	5 oz (150 g) per week	2 ½ oz (75 g) per week



To Supplement or Not? The Next Hot Topic!

While supplements can provide the benefits of omega-3 fats, they do not provide the other nutrients found in fish such as protein, vitamin D, zinc, and iron. At this time supplements are not recommended as a safe alternative to eating fish because research findings on the amount of contaminants they contain is inconsistent and we don't know how much is helpful or safe to take.

It is recommended that you do not take cod liver oil during pregnancy because liver oils contain large amounts of vitamin A. Too much vitamin A can cause symptoms like nausea, vomiting, vertigo, and blurred vision. When large doses have been taken for months or years symptoms can vary and may include birth defects and liver abnormalities.

What about Sport Fish?

Sport fish are fish caught in local lakes and rivers. The above recommendations do not include the consumption of sport fish because some sport fish may not be safe to eat. If you eat sport fish regularly check the Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish at <http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/en/water/fishguide/index.php> or call 1-800-820-2716.

For more information on A Healthy Start for You and Your Baby, visit our website at www.pdhu.on.ca, the Perth District Health Unit, or call Health Line at 519-271-7600 ext 267. Listowel area residents call 1-877-7348 ext 267.