

April 28, 2004

**FISH FACTS FOR
Pregnant Women, Women Who May Become Pregnant, Nursing Mothers and
Young Children**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently issued advice to **pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children** regarding methyl mercury in fish and shellfish.

FDA and EPA want to emphasize the benefits of eating fish as part of a healthy, balanced diet. Fish and shellfish are good sources of protein, omega 3 fatty acids and other important nutrients. A diet that includes a variety of fish and shellfish can contribute to heart health and proper growth and development in children. However, **pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children** are advised to modify the amount and type of fish they consume to reduce exposure to high levels of mercury.

Question: What is methyl mercury and is it dangerous?

Answer: Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and can also be released into the air from pollution. When mercury falls from the air into water, it is turned into methyl mercury. This type of mercury may be harmful to an unborn baby or young child's nervous system. Nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of methyl mercury, but it builds up in some types of fish and shellfish more than others.

Question: What type of fish/shellfish should I avoid?

Answer: **Pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children** should not eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish because they contain high levels of mercury.

Question: What type of fish is safe to eat?

Answer: **Pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children** may eat up to 12 ounces per week, per person, or approximately 2 average meals per week, of a **variety** of fish. Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury include:

- Shrimp
- Canned **light** tuna
- Salmon
- Pollock
- Catfish

Question: Can I eat white albacore tuna?

Answer: Albacore (white) tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna. **Pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children** may eat 6 ounces of albacore tuna per week.

Question: What type of tuna is provided in USDA's commodity food programs?

Answer: USDA provides only light tuna in the commodity food programs.

REMEMBER: Fish is an important part of a healthy diet. It is important for pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers and young children to continue to eat fish. Simply avoid those fish that are higher in mercury.

For additional information, visit these websites:

www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/news/2004/NEW01038.html

www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/mercury/backgroundunder.html

www.cfsan.fda.gov/seafood1.html

www.epa.gov/ost/fish