



**PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

U.S. affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, recipient of the 1985 Nobel Prize for Peace

[www.psr.org](http://www.psr.org)



# Healthy Fish, Healthy Families

**F**ish and other Seafood can play an important role in a

good diet. Because fish are high in protein but low in unhealthy fats, they make a great alternative to red meat. Fish are a good source of vitamins and minerals. They also contain nutrients called omega-3 fatty acids, which can prevent heart disease and help growth and healthy brain development in children.



## Why are some fish safer than others?

Pollution that reaches our lakes, streams, rivers and oceans can end up in the fish caught there. Two common pollutants-mercury and PCBs-are linked to preterm delivery, autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children, heart problems and possibly cancer.

**Mercury** pollution comes from coal-powered plants, mining and other industrial activities. When mercury lands in bodies of water, it moves up the food chain from the tiniest fish to the bigger ones that eat them. The older and larger these fish get, the more mercury collects in their flesh.

**PCBs** are industrial chemicals that are now outlawed but are still present in water and soil. PCBs are found in fatty parts of fish.

## Are these pollutants a reason to stop eating fish and shellfish?

**Not at all.** Although some kinds of seafood contain too much mercury and PCBs, others contain very little. By varying the kinds of fish in your diet and following certain guidelines, you can help protect the health of you and your children and enjoy all the benefits of fish. The advice here

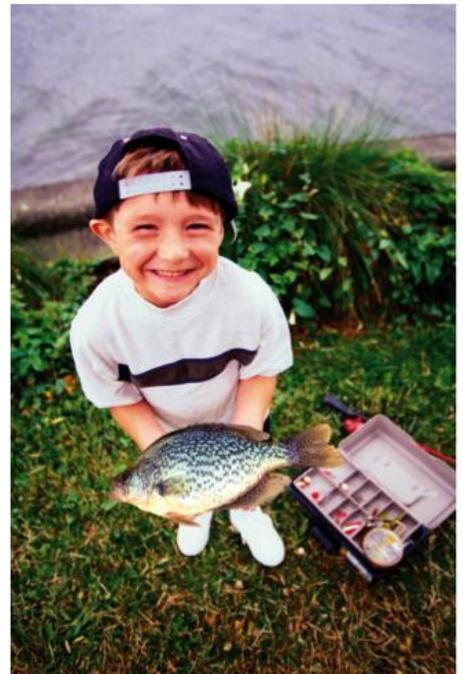
is more cautious than federal guidelines because doctors and other healthcare providers believe more protection is needed.

## Who should choose their fish carefully?

Mercury and PCBs can cause health problems for anyone. Because they alter developing brain structure, these pollutants can harm the fetus, babies and very young children most of all. Both mercury and PCBs linger in the body and build up over time. They can pass from a pregnant woman or a nursing mother to her baby. It's especially important for pregnant women, women who could get pregnant (including teenage girls) or who are breastfeeding, and all children under 15 to avoid eating fish that have high levels of mercury or PCBs. Anyone who eats a lot of fish (24 ounces or more) per week should also avoid high-mercury choices.

## What about kids?

Children should consume a wide variety of fish and shellfish from the lowest and low mercury categories. Children's portions should be smaller than adults ones. One serving might be 1–2 ounces for a toddler, but 2–3 ounces for an older, larger child. Shrimp, one favorite with kids, is low in pollutants. Fish sticks and fish sandwiches are typically made from fish that are low in pollutants.



## What fish choices make sense?

Here are general guidelines for women of child-bearing age, breastfeeding women, children under 15 and teenage girls:

- **Follow local and state fish advisories**, found at [www.epa.gov/ostwater/fish/](http://www.epa.gov/ostwater/fish/), which tell you when to avoid eating certain fish that you or your friends and family catch.
- **Eat a variety of fish and seafood from the lowest and low mercury categories- up to two servings (6 ounces = one adult serving) each week.**
- **If you eat fish or seafood from the higher mercury category, eat only one serving of fish that week. Pregnant women, breastfeeding women and children probably should not eat higher mercury fish at all.**
- **Salmon are low-mercury but farmed salmon may be high in PCBs or other pollutants compared with wild.** Choose fresh/frozen wild salmon twice a month, but limit farmed salmon to every other month. The safest wild salmon are canned and may be eaten weekly.
- **Children may eat the same number of servings of lowest and low-mercury fish as adults, but limit the size of children's portions based on their age and weight** (See the *what about kids* section for portion sizes).

## Cooking Salmon and other Fatty Fish

PCBs collect in the fatty parts of fish. You can take these steps to reduce PCB risks when cooking salmon, bluefish, and other fatty fish: trim away fatty areas such as the belly, top of the back, and dark meat along the side. Remove or puncture the skin before cooking to allow fat to drain off. Broil, grill, roast or steam the fish on a rack to allow fat to drain. Do not fry large, fatty types of fish such as salmon and bluefish. Throw away fat drippings. Don't use them in other cooking.



NOTE: These steps will not change the mercury levels in fish.

## The Great Tuna debate

Tuna does contain mercury. White or albacore tuna, fresh, and frozen tuna all come from bigger fish with much higher levels of mercury, so pregnant women, breastfeeding women and children probably should not eat them at all.

Light canned tuna on average has only a third of the mercury that albacore has though data from the Federal Drug Administration shows that 20% of light tuna tested since 2005 contained almost double the average level the agency lists for that type of tuna. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing which cans of light tuna have the higher amounts of mercury thus, pregnant women should be particularly careful about consuming any form of tuna including light canned due to potential damage to fetal brain development.

## Guide to Healthy Fish

Lowest mercury fish	Low-mercury fish	Higher-mercury fish (limit consumption to 1 serving per week)
Shrimp (most wild and U.S. farmed)	Haddock	Grouper
Scallops*	Pollock	Chilean Sea Bass
Sardines	Flounder and sole (flatfish)	Bluefish*
Wild and Alaska salmon (canned or fresh)	Atlantic croaker	Halibut
Oysters	Crawfish (domestic)	Sablefish (black cod)
Squid (domestic)	Catfish*	Spanish mackerel (Gulf)
Tilapia	Trout*	Fresh tuna (except skipjack)
	Atlantic Mackerel	
	Crab	
	Mullet	
-----	-----	-----
*if wild caught check with state health dept. about PCBs contamination	*if wild caught check with state health dept. about PCBs contamination	*if wild caught check with state health dept. about PCBs contamination

## How to eat Salmon

The following are recommendations for eating salmon due to possible PCBs and other non-mercury contaminants:

- canned Pacific 2 servings per week
- wild/Pacific (fresh/frozen) 2 servings per month
- farmed Atlantic (fresh/frozen) 1 serving every 2 months

## Avoid these fish- Highest Mercury Levels

Swordfish  
Shark  
King Mackerel  
Gulf Tilefish  
Marlin  
Orange Roughy

**Get involved! Anyone can become a member of Physicians for Social Responsibility. If you share our goal of protecting our health from the threat of toxic chemicals, please join today! Visit us at [www.PSR.org](http://www.PSR.org)**

This fact sheet was adapted from the fully referenced *Fish Consumption to Promote Good Health and Minimize Contaminants: A Quick Reference Guide for Clinicians*, published by ARHP and PSR and the ConsumerReports.org 2014 Special Report: *Can eating the wrong fish put you at higher risk for mercury exposure?*

**PSR**<sup>®</sup>

[www.psr.org](http://www.psr.org)  
1111 14<sup>th</sup> St. NW Suite 700 Washington DC 20005  
Phone: 202-667-4260