

## Answers to common questions

### Isn't swordfish a good source of omega-3 fatty acids?

**Yes.** Swordfish is a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, but several other fish lower in mercury are too. This includes mackerel, warehou (trevally), Atlantic salmon, canned salmon and tuna, herrings and sardines.

### Is canned tuna safe to eat regularly?

**Yes.** It is safe for everyone (including pregnant women) to consume canned tuna as part of their fish intake. Canned tuna generally has lower levels of mercury than tuna fillets because smaller tuna species are used and the tuna are generally younger when caught. Canned tuna and a variety of other types of non-canned tuna can be consumed according to the recommendations in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

### Does processing or cooking reduce the mercury content in fish?

**No.** The mercury content of fish is not reduced by processing techniques such as canning, freezing or cooking.

### What if I only like eating shark (flake)?

We recommend limiting your consumption of shark (flake), but you do not have to remove it from your diet completely. You may like to consider eating a variety of other types of fish. This may be an opportunity for you (and your family) to try new types of fish as part of a varied and balanced diet. Follow the recommendations for higher mercury-containing fish outlined in the table.

### What if I like to eat more than the recommended portions of fish per week?

Over-consumption of any single type of food, particularly to the exclusion of other foods, is not recommended. This is because it can lead to nutrient imbalances in your diet.

### What about fish oil products?

Fish oil products and supplements are not a major source of dietary mercury and there is no need to restrict your intake due to mercury content.

### Are other types of seafood, such as crustacea or molluscs, of concern for safe mercury intake?

**No.** Crustacea (including prawns, lobsters, and crabs) and molluscs (including oysters and calamari) generally contain lower levels of mercury than fish. Crustacea and molluscs don't tend to be eaten as often so they are not a significant source of mercury for the average Australian. However, if you consume large amounts of these foods regularly, they may increase your intake of mercury.

## Advice on safe fish consumption for New Zealand consumers

Advice on fish consumption may vary from country to country because the risk of excessive mercury intake depends on the environment, the type of fish commonly caught and eaten, the dietary patterns of fish consumption and other foods that may also contain mercury.

If you are in New Zealand we recommend the advice of the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries at: [www.mpi.govt.nz](http://www.mpi.govt.nz)

For other countries – consult your national food safety agency.



## Mercury in fish Advice on fish consumption

## Mercury in Fish

There are many nutritional benefits from eating fish as part of a balanced diet for good health. The following information has been developed to help you understand more about mercury in fish and safe levels in your diet.

High levels of mercury can damage the nervous system in the human body. Some studies report a link between high consumption of fish by pregnant women and subtle developmental delays in their children. If you are intending to become pregnant or are pregnant, it's important to know how much fish (and what type) you can safely eat. Unborn babies, infants and young children are especially vulnerable to excessive mercury intake, as they are going through rapid growth and development.

## About mercury levels in fish

Mercury occurs naturally in the environment and builds up in fish over time. All fish contain some mercury with most fish having low levels. Only a few species have higher amounts. The amount of mercury depends on the age of a fish, the environment in which it lives and what it eats. Big fish that have long lifespans and predatory fish such as swordfish and shark/flake tend to have higher levels of mercury than other smaller, younger fish.

Most people only eat moderate amounts of fish so the benefits of eating fish far outweigh any potential risks related to mercury intake.

## What are the health benefits of fish?

Fish is an excellent source of protein, essential omega-3 fatty acids, iodine, important vitamins and is low in saturated fat. Although mercury is present at low levels in most fish, there is no need for anyone (including pregnant and breastfeeding women) to stop eating fish altogether.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend enjoying a variety of nutritious foods including fish. The following table shows how many portions of different types of fish are safe to eat based on their mercury content. You can eat other types of fish that are not listed in the table according to the recommendations in the Australian dietary guidelines, but if you do, you should avoid eating any of the fish listed in the table during that week or fortnight.

## Recommendations on the safe consumption of fish

This table provides guidance on the size and number of portions that can safely be consumed for different types of fish and population groups.

<b>Women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning pregnancy</b>	<b>Children (up to 6 years)</b>	<b>Rest of the population</b>
<b>1 portion 150 grams#</b>	<b>1 portion is 75 grams*</b>	<b>1 portion is 150 grams*</b>
1 portion per week of Orange Roughy (Deep Sea Perch) or Catfish and no other fish that week		1 portion per week of Shark (Flake) or Billfish (Swordfish/Broadbill, and Marlin) and no other fish that week.
or		
1 portion per fortnight of Shark (Flake) or Billfish (Swordfish/Broadbill and Marlin) and no other fish that fortnight		

#To avoid exceeding the portion sizes above over the given time periods in the table, you should:

- Check the serving size on the label of packaged or canned fish. One serving could be higher or lower than the portion sizes in the table.
- Divide the portion size into smaller amounts, for example, by having two amounts over two meals or three even smaller amounts over three meals.

If you are in doubt about the type or name of the fish you want to buy, ask the sales person. This includes when shopping at a supermarket, eating out at a restaurant or ordering take away.

**NOTE:** The advice in the table above provides guidance on fish consumption in portion sizes. These portion sizes are different to the suggested serving size of 100 g for fish noted in the Australian Dietary Guidelines.

For more information about the dietary guidelines, go to Healthy Eating at [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au)

## Advice on fish consumption for different life stages

### During pregnancy

Women should limit their intake of high mercury-containing fish when planning, and during pregnancy because unborn babies are particularly vulnerable to the potentially harmful effects of excessive mercury intake.

By being informed about mercury and the types of fish to limit in your diet, you can reduce the risk of harm to your unborn baby while still enjoying the health benefits of eating fish.

### During breastfeeding

If you have limited your mercury intake up to and during pregnancy, the amount of mercury transferred through breast milk will be very low. The benefits of breastfeeding your baby far outweigh any risk posed by the small amount of mercury that may be present in human milk.

As a precaution, you should limit your mercury intake while breastfeeding by following the advice in the table.

### Early childhood

The nutrients in fish provide important health benefits for the growth and development needs of children. You do not need to remove fish from their diet, but you should ensure their intake does not exceed the recommended portions in the table.