



How to Avoid Eating Fish Containing Pollutants

Expert
Reviewed

Three Methods: [Avoiding Pollutants In Fish](#) [Protecting Yourself When You Buy Fish](#) [Understanding The Dangers In Fish](#)

Eating fish is recommended for the high levels of healthy omega-3 fats, the various vitamins and minerals contained in fish, and the high protein content; however, there are also constant reports about dangerous contaminants found in fish, particularly heavy toxic metals such as mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and chlordanes.^[1] Learn how to avoid eating pollutants in fish so you can incorporate these healthy foods into your diet.

Method
1

Avoiding Pollutants In Fish

1 Try to avoid mercury in fish. Mercury is most dangerous to small children and pregnant women, those are who should be most concerned about mercury in fish. Children under the age of six and women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or who intend to get pregnant in the next year should:^[2]

- Avoid ahi, albacore, and bigeye tuna (depending on where they were fished), swordfish, shark, king mackerel, marlin, orange roughy, and shellfish. You should also avoid tilefish, especially from the Gulf of Mexico.
- Avoid any fish caught in any waters that are subject to a mercury advisory. To find current advisories, visit the [Environmental Protection Agency](#) website.
- For local advisories, visit your state, county, or other local fish agency.

2 Restrict your intake of mercury fish. If you do eat fish that possibly contain mercury, restrict your intake. For example, the EPA recommends no more than $\frac{2}{3}$ of a can of albacore tuna per week.^[3]

- Eat 12 ounces, or two to three meals, each week of fish that do not contain mercury.^[4]

3 Eat less fish that high in PCBs. To reduce your exposure to PCBs, refrain from eating fish that have high levels of it. You can have around four ounces, or one meal, every week or two of black bass, carp, freshwater perch, grouper, halibut, lobster, mahi mahi, snapper, Spanish mackerel from the south Atlantic, tilefish from the Atlantic, and white croaker from the Pacific.^[5]

- Do not eat striped bass, blue fish, Chilean sea bass, king mackerel, marlin, Spanish mackerel from the Gulf of Mexico, and walleye from the Great Lakes and Canada.

4 Check the pollutant information in areas you fish recreationally. If you fish and want to eat what you catch, make sure you check local and government websites for any state or local fish consumption advisories. If you are fishing in an area where there are contaminated waters, refrain from eating the fish.^[6]

- If you are unsure about the waters you are fishing in, be safe and practice catch-and-release.

Method
2

Protecting Yourself When You Buy Fish

1 Buy wild caught fish. Only buy wild caught fish, not farmed fish. The aquaculture industry currently does not universally follow a number of recommendations designed to decrease the levels of various pollutants.

2 Purchase fish from a sustainable source. Because only eating wild caught fish will eventually lead to fish depletion, agencies have set up sustainable sources. These sustainable sources, such as the Marine Stewardship Council, work with fisheries to keep oceans healthy while holding these fisheries to standards. Look for fish packages that have labels from a sustainable source.^[7]

3 Check for the best choices. Keep a check on the [Environmental Defense Fund's Seafood selector](#) as often as possible to find the best current choices.^[8] Currently, the best fish to eat are:

- Albacore tuna from the US and Canada
- Atlantic mackerel from Canada
- Pacific sardines from the US and Canada
- Sablefish/Black cod
- Wild salmon from Alaska

4 Know the best sushi to eat. When you go to eat sushi, be aware of the best seafood to eat. The best choices for sushi are:^[9]

- Shrimp
- Abalone
- Yellowtail tuna
- Clams, oysters, and scallops
- Flounder and Sole
- Halibut
- Squid
- Salmon
- Tilapia
- Lobster and crab
- Sardines
- Sea bass

Method
3

Understanding The Dangers In Fish

1 Learn the dangers of mercury. One of the main sources of mercury contamination is through fish.^[10] The highest risk for mercury poisoning is for the developing fetus, so pregnant mothers must be particularly careful when choosing fish.

- Fish that the highest concentrations of mercury include saltwater fish like shark, swordfish, and tuna. Freshwater fish, such as pike, walleye, and bass, are also known to be potentially high in mercury.

2 Know about PCBs. PCBs, used in electrical equipment, building materials, and to keep dust down on roads, were banned in the US in 1979. However, these cancer-causing chemicals are still found in foods, oceans, rivers, and soils. PCBs can be degraded by sunlight and by various microorganisms, but the process can be slow.^[11]

3 Be aware of pesticide contamination. Pesticides can be very difficult to track and are often not even tested for, likely because there are so many. Pesticide contamination is most common in freshwater fish with nearby agricultural runoff.

4 Check your mercury levels. Have your mercury blood levels checked every year, especially if you eat a lot of fish. If you intend to become pregnant and are concerned about mercury levels, avoid any of the fish listed for six to 12 months and get re-tested before trying to get pregnant.

Tips

- If you can't eat fish, consider fortified eggs, milk, and yogurt for nutritional support.

Sources and Citations

1. <http://seafood.oregonstate.edu/.pdf%20Links/Contaminants%20in%20Fish%20and%20Seafood%20-%20A%20Guide%20to%20Safe%20Consumption%20-%20PowerPoint.pdf>

2. <http://www.nrdc.org/health/effects/mercury/protect.asp>
3. <http://www.epa.gov/fish-tech/epa-fda-advisory-mercury-fish-and-shellfish>

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