



Eat 12 oz of fish a week for a healthy diet.

*This is the U. S. Department of Agriculture nutrition guidelines recommendation as of March 2011.*

# What's the Story with Ocean Fish?

## Pregnant or breastfeeding?

### *How is eating fish good for my developing baby?*

Ocean fish are the No. 1 source of cell-building fatty acids. Omega-3 fatty acids make up more than one-half of a newborn baby's brain, and the DHA content of the brain triples during the first 3 months of life. Likewise, the retina of the eye is as much as 65% DHA. When it comes to baby's development, especially for the eyes and brain, it is vital that you eat enough of the omega-3s DHA and EPA.

### *Is eating fish good for pregnant and nursing women?*

For moms, the omega-3s and critical nutrients in ocean fish are good for maintaining a healthy heart and a healthy immune system. Since nutrients from mom are passed on to her developing baby, not getting enough of these essential nutrients can deplete mom's stores and increase her risk for many disorders.

### *What are the long-term effects on my child if I eat seafood when I'm pregnant?*

Very positive! Major studies in the United Kingdom, the Seychelles Islands, and Massachusetts have shown that pregnant women who ate more than 12 oz of fish a week gave birth to children who performed better on measures of cognitive, motor, and social development than children of those who avoided ocean fish during their pregnancy.

### *What does the American Medical Association recommend?*

The American Medical Association recommends 200 mg of DHA a day for pregnant and nursing women. This is one to two 4-oz servings of salmon or canned white tuna a week.

## Want to learn more?

Visit [www.undeerc.org/fish](http://www.undeerc.org/fish)

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## Food for Thought



# Ocean Fish, Mercury, and Nutrition

## Why should I eat fish?

Ocean fish are an important source of many nutrients and are rich in:

- Omega-3s.
- Vitamins D and E.
- Minerals like iodine, calcium, and selenium.

Ocean fish provide the important nutrients for strong bones, brain development, and healthy immune and cardiovascular systems.

## *Do adults benefit from eating fish?*

Yes! The omega-3 fatty acids DHA and EPA are obtained almost exclusively from eating ocean fish. These omega-3s are critical for heart health and have a positive effect on Type 1 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, skin disorders, inflammatory diseases, macular degeneration, and cancer, to name a few.

## *Do children need to eat fish?*

Yes! Development doesn't stop at birth and neither do the benefits of the nutrients in ocean fish. Brain development, strong bones, and heart health are important for children of all ages. Dietary habits from youth carry through to adult life, so eating ocean fish from a young age promotes a lifetime of good health.

## What about mercury in fish?

Because mercury is part of the natural environment, it is present in the world's oceans. Mercury levels in fish increase up the food chain as small fish are eaten by larger fish, which are eaten by even larger fish. Older and larger fish are likely to contain more mercury than young or small fish. Because of concern about providing important nutrients to developing babies while limiting exposure to mercury, the federal government issues guidelines for fish consumption.

## *What are the guidelines for pregnant and nursing moms?*

The U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) recommends and encourages pregnant and nursing moms to eat 12 oz of ocean fish weekly for the health of their babies but to avoid the four fish that are known to be the highest in mercury: swordfish, shark, tilefish, and king mackerel. The FDA also recommends checking local advisories for the varieties of fish you catch yourself.

## *What are the guidelines for young children?*

Because brains are still developing at this age, the FDA recommends that young children eat a variety of fish but follow the same guidelines as those for pregnant women.

## *What are the guidelines for the rest of us?*

Eat ocean fish! There are no FDA recommendations to avoid any ocean fish.

## *Why does the FDA say pregnant women and young children should avoid these four fish?*

The FDA recommended the exclusion of the four large, long-lived predatory ocean fish from the diets of pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, and young children because these fish are known to contain much higher levels of mercury than other ocean fish.

*Where can I find my local fish advisory?*  
[www.undeerc.org/fish](http://www.undeerc.org/fish)

## Have you heard about selenium in a healthy diet?

### *What is selenium?*

Selenium is a naturally occurring element that is important for your health. It is especially important for your brain and nervous system.

### *Where is selenium found?*

Selenium is found in the oceans and in varying amounts in soil. In our diet, ocean fish are a major source of selenium. Foods grown in selenium-rich soils are also good sources.

### *What does selenium do in our bodies?*

Our bodies need selenium to make important proteins. These proteins are also needed for the proper function and protection of the brain and many other systems in the body.

### *The selenium-mercury connection*

Mercury has the ability to combine with selenium, forming a bond that will not break. This selenium-mercury bond prevents selenium from being available for our bodies to use. Too much mercury and not enough selenium can result in negative health effects. Since most ocean fish contain much more selenium than mercury, they are safe to eat.

### *Bon appétit!*

Dense with nutrients, high in protein, and low in calories and cholesterol, ocean fish are an ideal food source in a healthy diet. Bake or broil fish to retain natural flavor without adding unhealthy fats from frying.

# *Bon Appétit!*