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News You Can Use – Nutrition, Food Safety, & Health



## Fish: The Swimming Superfood

Fish and seafood are some of the most nutritious foods around. Fish contains a variety of nutrients, including some that are scarce in other foods. Eating fish is associated with many health benefits, and the US Dietary Guidelines recommend that we eat eight ounces (about two servings) of fish per week. Yet, most of us eat far less. Read more about the nutritional benefits of consuming fish and other considerations you may want to take into account before you choose what fish you will eat.

### Nutrition

Fish consumption is linked to reduced risk for heart disease, improved brain health, healthy pregnancies, and healthy fetal development. In addition to being a source of easily digestible protein, fish contains many other nutrients. It is a good source of heme iron, which is an easily absorbed form of iron found only in animal foods such as fish and meat. Fish is also one of the best sources of B vitamins such as B12, B6, niacin, and riboflavin. Eating a variety of fish is a great way to get more minerals such as selenium, zinc, copper, iodine, and manganese.

In general, fish are very lean, but so-called “fatty fish” have a slightly higher fat content. Fatty fish are important sources of the fat-soluble vitamins: A, D, E, and K. They also contain DHA and EPA, types of healthy, unsaturated omega-3 fatty acids. Research shows that DHA and EPA are vital to fetal and infant development, heart health, and more. Other foods, such as nuts, contain other types of omega-3s, but

fatty fish are the main dietary sources of DHA and EPA. Fatty fish include salmon, mackerel, anchovies, sardines, herring, tuna, and lake trout.

### Sustainability

While many health experts agree that fish and seafood provide wonderful health benefits and we may benefit from eating more, at the same time there are concerns about sustainability and the environmental impact of the increased demand for fish. These are important concerns, yet they apply to all foods, not just fish. Thus, they are not a reason to avoid eating fish completely. Refer to the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch Guide at [seafoodwatch.org](http://seafoodwatch.org) for more information about which wild-caught and farmed fish choices are the most sustainable. Also, when you purchase fish, ask your retailer where it is from and if it is sustainably caught.

### Safety

Contamination from heavy metals, pollutants, and pesticides impacting the safety of fish is another concern. However, a comprehensive study from the Harvard School of Public Health found that the health benefits greatly outweigh the risks of eating almost all fish.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) together with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), released updated recommendations on promoting safe fish consumption for everyone, but especially women who are pregnant, may become pregnant, or are breastfeeding. This update came about after finding that this population of women were choosing not to eat fish out of concern for potential contaminants, while missing out on the healthful benefits for the developing and growing baby.

The message that the FDA and EPA want to convey, is that fish should be a part of a healthy diet. Making safe choices can provide beneficial nutrients vital for infant brain development as well as for the mother and general population. Contaminants, including mercury, are a concern in larger, older fish due to the build-up in the tissue. The user-friendly chart shown below, [Advice about Eating Fish](#), is available from the FDA website to help you choose fish that will minimize contaminant risk.

Contamination can also be a concern in lakes and streams, so if you catch your own fish, make sure to check your state advisories. Some fish caught locally in Colorado can accumulate mercury at unsafe levels. Go to the [Fish Consumption Guidelines for Colorado](#) on the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) website for fun tips on safely enjoying Colorado fish.

### Farmed or Wild?

Fish farming (also known as aquaculture) has increased over the last few years due to increased demand. How do farmed and wild-caught fish compare? Contamination and sustainability concerns can impact both wild-caught and farmed fish. Often, farmed fish can be more sustainable and less contaminated than wild fish, but this depends on where and how the fish is farmed or caught, as different countries have different regulations.

The nutrition of fish can vary some based on what the fish eat, so there may be some nutritional variations between wild-caught and farmed fish. In addition, the same species of farmed fish may vary based on what they are fed. Nevertheless, both farmed and wild-caught fish are healthy and high in nutrients. There is no clear-cut answer as to whether farmed or wild-caught fish is “better.” Be an informed consumer when purchasing your fish by using resources such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the U.S. FDA, and know that both farmed and wild fish can be great, healthy choices.

## Advice About Eating Fish

### What Pregnant Women & Parents Should Know

Fish and other protein-rich foods have nutrients that can help your child's growth and development.

For women of childbearing age (about 16-49 years old), especially pregnant and breastfeeding women, and for parents and caregivers of young children.

- Eat 2 to 3 servings of fish a week from the “Best Choices” list OR 1 serving from the “Good Choices” list.
- Eat a variety of fish.
- Serve 1 to 2 servings of fish a week to children, starting at age 2.
- If you eat fish caught by family or friends, check for fish advisories. If there is no advisory, eat only one serving and no other fish that week.\*

### Use this chart!

You can use this chart to help you choose which fish to eat, and how often to eat them, based on their mercury levels. The “Best Choices” have the lowest levels of mercury.

What is a serving?

To find out,  
use the palm  
of your hand!



For an adult  
4 ounces

For children,  
ages 4 to 7  
2 ounces

Best Choices EAT 2 TO 3 SERVINGS A WEEK			OR Good Choices EAT 1 SERVING A WEEK		
Anchovy	Herring	Scallop	Bluefish	Monkfish	Tilefish (Atlantic Ocean)
Atlantic croaker	Lobster, American and spiny	Shad	Buffalo fish	Rockfish	Tuna, albacore/white tuna, canned and fresh/frozen
Atlantic mackerel	Mullet	Shrimp	Carp	Sablefish	Tuna, yellowfin
Black sea bass	Oyster	Skate	Chilean sea bass/Patagonian toothfish	Sheepshead	Weakfish/seatROUT
Butterfish	Pacific chub mackerel	Smelt	Grouper	Snapper	White croaker/Pacific croaker
Catfish	Perch, freshwater and ocean	Sole	Halibut	Spanish mackerel	
Clam	Pickeral	Squid	Mahi mahi/dolphinfish	Striped bass (ocean)	
Cod	Plaice	Tilapia			
Crab	Pollock	Trout, freshwater			
Crawfish	Salmon	Tuna, canned light (includes skipjack)			
Flounder	Sardine	Whitefish			
Haddock		Whiting			
Hake					

  

Choices to Avoid HIGHEST MERCURY LEVELS		
King mackerel	Shark	Tilefish (Gulf of Mexico)
Marlin	Swordfish	Tuna, bigeye
Orange roughy		

\*Some fish caught by family and friends, such as larger carp, catfish, trout and perch, are more likely to have fish advisories due to mercury or other contaminants. State advisories will tell you how often you can safely eat those fish.

[www.FDA.gov/fishadvice](http://www.FDA.gov/fishadvice)

[www.EPA.gov/fishadvice](http://www.EPA.gov/fishadvice)



THIS ADVICE REFERS TO FISH AND SHELLFISH COLLECTIVELY AS “FISH” / ADVICE UPDATED JANUARY 2017

### Fish Tips:

- Aim to eat about two servings of fish each week, and make one of those servings a fatty fish.
- Eat a variety of different types of fish to get the full range of benefits, while minimizing any risks.
- Don’t forget canned fish. Tuna isn’t the only option! Experiment with making canned salmon cakes, a sardine spread, or bagna cauda dipping sauce (a classic Italian sauce made with olive oil, garlic, and anchovies).
- Grill fish for great flavor and easy clean up. Grill with olive oil, lemon slices, and dill.
- Eat fresh fish within two days of purchase, and consume frozen fish within about two months of purchase.
- Always thaw frozen fish in the refrigerator.

**The bottom line:**

To get the many benefits of fish, eat a variety of fish, rather than the same kind all the time. Whether freshwater, saltwater, finfish, or shellfish, there is a bounty of healthy and delicious options. As with all your food choices, aim to choose wisely and responsibly with regards to the environment and your health!

**Sources:**

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