

Health and Wellness:
Is There a Safe Canned Tuna? – And Other Good Fish Choices!

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Tuna seems like a great food choice because of its numerous nutrients, high quality protein, low saturated fat content and high Omega-3 fatty acids level. It can be particularly tasty served with your favorite fixings in a sandwich or salad for lunch. Unfortunately, some tuna is very high in mercury.

Mercury turns into methylmercury in the water. While methylmercury is removed from the body naturally, it accumulates in the bloodstream over time. Even when deliberately avoiding mercury in the food, it can take over a year for the level to significantly drop. Because mercury is present in most fish/shellfish, and it can cause significant health problems, read on to learn which health problems, the best/safest type of fish to purchase as well as which fish to avoid, how many times a week is considered safe to eat fish and why all women and young children should be extra cautious.

Health Problems Which Can Be Caused by Mercury?

- Brain and nervous system damage;
- heart damage; and
- kidney damage.

Best/Safest Type of Fish to Purchase

- Canned light tuna;
- Catfish and Pollock; and
- Salmon (the “I” is silent).

Fish With Worst Contamination Levels

- Halibut, King Mackerel and Marlin;
- Sea bass, Shark, Swordfish and Tilefish; and
- Dozens of species in seriously polluted water.

Note that although highly popular, albacore (“white”) tuna contains more mercury than canned light tuna.

How Many Times a Week Is Considered Safe to Eat Fish?

With good reason to be skeptical about mercury levels in fish regularly eaten, here is a link to a very helpful calculator created by www.GotMercury.org. This website is extremely easy and quick to determine if anyone in your family is consuming too much mercury. All you need to give is each family member’s weight and type and quantity of fish. Also, here’s the FDA’s link to “What You Need to Know About Fish and Shellfish:” <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/UCM182158.pdf>.

Why Women and Young Children Should Be Extra Cautious

Young children, pregnant women, nursing mothers and all women having a baby in the next couple of years should drastically reduce and hopefully eliminate mercury from their diets because babies exposed to mercury in the womb and young children can: (a) lead to learning deficits, (b) delay mental development, and (c) cause neurological problems including brain damage.

How Does Mercury Get Into the Fish?

(Here’s my attempt at humor→) Since fish are not consuming your old household mercury thermometers, here is how mercury finds its way into these fish. Simply put, industrial plants release tons of mercury into the air which is then carried by the winds and deposited into the water, and in turn consumed by fish through the food chain. Larger fish typically have higher levels of mercury because they’ve lived longer and consumed more contaminated fish (hence “light” and therefore smaller tuna is better). Ideally it would be better if mercury pollution were halted at industrial plants and other sources so that the problem is completely avoided. If we switch from coal to renewable energy sources and adopt aggressive deployment of conservation measures, we would all enjoy a healthier environment. That’s another article though.

Here are links to some of the research used to write this article:

- 1) <http://apps.edf.org/article.cfm?contentID=7682>
- 2) <http://ehp03.niehs.nih.gov/article/fetchArticle.action?articleURI=info%3Adoi%2F10.1289%2Fehp.9377>
- 3) <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/UCM182158.pdf>
- 4) <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2006/01/19/fda-finally-studies-mercury-in-canned-tuna.aspx> and <http://products.mercola.com/salmon-oil/>