

North Carolina Women's Hospital
Safety Facts for a Healthy Pregnancy
~ FISH~

When you are pregnant it is very important to eat well and take care of yourself. Fish is a good source of protein. Here is some important information about the safest ways to choose, prepare and eat fish during pregnancy. This information is also important for nursing mothers and young children.

Is eating fish healthy during pregnancy?

Fish and seafood are healthy foods. They are rich in protein and low in saturated fat. Also, certain kinds of fish contain nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, oils, minerals, and essential amino acids that help keep your heart healthy. However, some kinds of fish contain mercury which in large amounts can be harmful.

How can you eat fish safely during pregnancy?

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have guidelines about eating fish during pregnancy. These guidelines recommend eating no more than 12 ounces (2 servings) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are low in mercury.

Specific recommendations are:

- Do not eat SHARK, SWORDFISH, KING MACKERAL, SPANISH MACKERAL or TILEFISH.
- Eat no more than one serving (6 ounces) of fish from local rivers, lakes or ponds each week. If you eat fish from local waters, don't eat other fish in that same week.
- Do not eat these fish if they were caught either east or south of I-85: BLACKFISH, (BOWFIN), LARGEMOUTH BASS, OR JACK FISH (CHAIN PICKERAL). These particular fish feed on plants polluted by the Haw River drainage.
- Good choices are shrimp, salmon, pollock, flounder, oysters, and clams.
- Canned light tuna is a good choice to eat, however albacore tuna (fresh or canned) or fresh or frozen tuna should be avoided.

What is the safest way to prepare fish and seafood?

When you are making meals, follow these guidelines to avoid getting sick from bacteria that may be present in raw fish or seafood:

- When you are preparing raw fish or seafood, wash your hands and anything that comes in contact with the fish with warm soapy water.
- Keep raw fish or seafood separate from cooked fish or seafood. For example, do not put cooked fish on a plate that had raw fish or seafood on it without first washing the plate with hot soapy water.
- Be sure to completely cook the fish. Test the fish for doneness by putting a fork into the thickest part of the fish and check that it flakes easily. Put leftover cooked or raw fish or seafood in the refrigerator or freezer right away because it can grow bacteria in just two hours.

If you have other questions or concerns about food safety in pregnancy or while you are nursing your baby, ask your health care provider.

Another resource for the most up-to-date information is the North Carolina Public Health Department at 919-733-3410

or www.epi.state.nc.us/epi/fish

Or the Environmental Protection Agency at

www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish

Eat Fish LOW in mercury:

Ocean Fish:

Black drum
Cod
Crab
Croaker
Flounder
Haddock
Halibut
Herring
Jacksmelt
Lobster
Mahi-mahi
Ocean perch
Oysters
Pollock
Pompano
Red drum
Salmon (canned, fresh or frozen)
Scallops
Sheepshead
Shrimp
Skate
Southern kingfish (sea mullet)
Spot
Speckled trout (spotted sea trout)
Tripletail
Tuna (canned light)
Whitefish
Whitegrunt

Freshwater Fish:

Bluegill sunfish
Farm-raised catfish
Farm-raised trout
Farm-raised crayfish
Tilapia
Trout

Avoid Fish HIGH in mercury:

Ocean Fish:

Albacore (white) tuna** fresh or canned
Almaco jack
Banded rudderfish
Cobia
Crevalle jack
Greater amberjack
South Atlantic grouper (gag, scamp, red and snowy)
King mackerel
Ladyfish
Little tunny
Marlin
Orange roughy
Shark
Spanish mackerel
Swordfish
Tilefish
Tuna, fresh or frozen**

Freshwater Fish:

Blackfish (bowfin)*
Black crappie***
Catfish (caught wild)*
Jack fish (chain pickerel)*

Largemouth bass (statewide)

Walleye from Lake Fontana and Lake Santeetlah (Graham and Swain counties)
Warmouth*
Yellow perch*

*High mercury levels have been found in blackfish (bowfin), catfish, jack fish (chain pickerel), warmouth, and yellow perch caught south and east of Interstate 85.

**Different species from canned light tuna

***High mercury levels have been found in black crappie caught south and east of Interstate 95.