

Are you at risk from eating fish?

Seafood can be a great source of protein and iron — crucial nutrients for your baby's growth and development. And the omega-3 fatty acids in many fish can promote your baby's brain development. Research has shown that skimping on seafood during pregnancy may contribute to a child having poor verbal skills, behavioral problems and other early developmental issues.

But some types of seafood — particularly large, predatory fish such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish — may contain high levels of mercury. Although the mercury in seafood isn't a concern for most adults, special precautions apply if you're pregnant or planning to become pregnant. If you regularly eat fish high in mercury, the substance can accumulate in your bloodstream over time. In turn, too much mercury in your bloodstream may damage your baby's developing brain and nervous system.

What's safe to eat?

Some types of seafood contain little mercury. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) say pregnant women can safely eat up to 12 ounces a week (340 grams) or two average meals of:

- § Shrimp
- § Canned light tuna (limit albacore tuna and tuna steak to no more than 6 ounces a week)
- § Salmon
- § Pollock
- § Catfish

Pregnancy and fish: What's too little — or too much?

Are there other guidelines for pregnancy and fish?

Consider these precautions:

- § **Avoid large, predatory fish.** To reduce your exposure to mercury, don't eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish.
- § **Avoid raw fish and shellfish.** To avoid ingesting harmful bacteria or viruses, avoid raw fish and shellfish — especially oysters and clams — and anything you know was caught in polluted water. Refrigerated smoked seafood, such as lox, also is off-limits.

- § **Understand local fish advisories.** If you eat fish from local waters, pay attention to local fish advisories. Larger game fish contaminated with chemical pollutants may potentially harm a developing baby. If advice isn't available, limit consumption of fish from local waters to 6 ounces a week and don't eat other fish that week.

- § **Cook seafood properly.** Cook fish to an internal temperature of 145 F (67 C). The fish is done when it separates into flakes and appears opaque throughout. Cook shrimp, lobster and scallops until they're milky white. Cook clams, mussels and oysters until their shells open. Discard any that don't open.

What's the bottom line?

Though mercury can harm a developing baby's brain, eating average amounts of seafood containing low levels of mercury during pregnancy hasn't been shown to cause problems. And the omega-3 fatty acids in many types of fish — especially salmon and tuna — promote healthy fetal development. As long as you avoid fish known to be high in mercury or contaminated with pollutants, fish can be a regular part of your healthy-eating plan.

Additional information is listed on the U.S. EPA internet site www.epa.gov/ost/fish or by calling 1-800-490-9198 and request document number EPA 823-B-97-009