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Fish 101: Angling for the Right Stuff

Chances are that you've thought about how best to get enough omega-3 fats into your diet. You're well aware of the reported health benefits and have educated yourself on the richest sources (think SMASHT - we'll spell out this acronym below). But since you've started paying more attention, you've heard that farm-raised salmon contains higher levels of environmental toxins, and you likely know that over-fishing has depleted a great percentage of the worldwide fishing stocks. The next time you sit down to dinner, how confident will you be in your ability to choose wisely, getting the healthiest fish possible while supporting sustainable fishing practices?



As a protein source, fish rates high. It is low in saturated fat, contains a healthy dose of vitamin D, and depending on the fish, is the richest dietary source of long-chain omega-3 fats. Researchers encourage us to consume omega-3 rich fish twice each week as a way to reduce our heart disease risk by 33%. Memorize the SMASHT acronym to learn the primary omega-3 fish. It stands for:

- S** - Salmon
- M** - Mackerel
- A** - Anchovies
- S** - Sardines
- H** - Herring (actually classified as a sardine)
- T** - Tuna

Health Risks from Eating Fish

Fish accumulate environmental toxins, including mercury and PCBs, from eating other marine life. As a general rule, the larger the fish, the greater the accumulation. How much these toxins affect individuals is unclear. Pregnant women, nursing women, and children are clearly more susceptible to the damaging effects of mercury.

Mercury

Mercury is produced naturally (weathering of rocks and volcanic eruptions) and from industry, primarily from coal burning plants. It is estimated that the man-made production of mercury is three times greater than natural emissions. Whatever its source, as mercury settles in the environment, bacteria changes it into *methylmercury*, a toxic form particularly harmful to fetuses and developing children. Large, long-lived fish, like shark, swordfish, tilefish, and king mackerel, accumulate the highest levels of methylmercury. The FDA has established the following recommendations for pregnant women and children:

1. Do not eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel, or tilefish (golden bass, golden snapper).
 - Eat up to 12 ounces (2 average meals) a week of shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish.
 - Eat up to 6 ounces (1 average meal) a week of albacore ("white") tuna.
2. Eat up to 6 ounces (one average meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, but don't consume any other fish during that week.
3. Follow these same recommendations when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but serve smaller portions.

For more information: <http://www.epa.gov/ost/fish/>

While it is difficult to find any clear recommendations from the EPA or FDA for fish intake for the healthy adult male and female (not child bearing), the best guideline is to limit high mercury fish (1.0 parts per million (ppm) methylmercury) to no more than 7

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