

The Health Benefits from Eating Fish

Questions and Answers on Selected Topics

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Health Benefit Answers

[What are the health benefits of eating fish?](#)

Fish are nutritious and good to eat. Many doctors suggest that eating (8 oz) one-half pound of fish each week helps to prevent heart disease. When properly prepared, fish provide numerous health benefits. The American Heart Association recommends eating two to three fish meals each week. The benefits of eating fish include:

- Fish offer high-quality protein with fewer calories than a similar-sized portion of meat. For example, both catfish and ground beef are about 18 percent protein. But for an eight-ounce meal, catfish has 232 calories while the ground beef has 640 calories.
- Fish are low in sodium and are a good source of potassium, vitamins and other minerals.
- Fish are generally low in cholesterol and saturated fats which have been associated with heart disease.
- While the health benefits of fish are still being studied, much of the current research is focused on various kinds of beneficial fats in fish, particularly the kind called omega-3 fatty acids found in some fish and fish oils. Some studies have indicated that these fatty acids have favorable effects on health conditions such as hardening of the arteries and high cholesterol.

[Will I get sick if I eat the fish?](#)

Your risk from eating contaminated fish cannot be predicted. However, these advisories are based on the most current recommendations from health and environmental professionals and are based on keeping the amount of contaminant ingested below levels where adverse health effects

are likely. Nationally, cancer affects about one in every four people by age 70, and is chiefly due to smoking, diet, and hereditary risk factors. If you follow the advisory guidelines, you can minimize your exposure and reduce the risks that are associated with these contaminants.

Can I eat 12 meals of these fish in one month and no more for the rest of the year?

Yes, but it is not recommended. Risk assessment is based on a lifetime of exposure. When you eat 12 meals in one month, you get a large dose of contaminants. If you eat one meal per month, you are getting a series of low level doses. Think of it like taking aspirin for a headache. The label recommends taking two tablets every four hours. That's 12 aspirins during the day. However, you wouldn't want to take all 12 aspirins at one time.

Should I stop eating fish?

We are NOT recommending that you stop eating sport fish, except where "Do not eat" is shown in the advisory. Eating fish regularly offers several health benefits. You will gain those benefits if you follow this fish advisory information carefully to: choose safer places to fish; pick safer species to eat, trim and cook your catch correctly, and follow the recommended meal frequency. At the same time you will reduce your exposure to possible contaminants.

What about eating tuna fish?

The USFDA has recently issued advice for women of childbearing age and children. Advice for fish in the market place are the responsibility of the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The FDA and USEPA recently issued advice that recommends that women and children eat two to three servings (8-12 ounces for adults and children over age 10, smaller amounts for younger children) of a variety of fish and shellfish each week. The advice includes a chart showing how often to eat more than 60 types of fish and shellfish and supplemental questions and answers.

- Complete Advice (Chart plus Questions and Answers)
 - **English** (PDF) (8 pp, 203 K)
 - **Español** (PDF) (8 pp, 376 K)
 - Additional languages coming soon!
- **Chart only** (English | Español) (additional languages coming soon!)
- **Press Release** (January 18, 2017)
- **Federal Register Notice** (January 19, 2017)

The American Heart Association and other health agencies encourage people to eat two or more meals of fish per week. Does this advice conflict with the West Virginia Sport Fish Consumption Advisory?

Not necessarily; the West Virginia advisory is based on where the fish are caught. People are advised to follow the advisory in West Virginia waters. As long as people are aware and follow of the nationwide mercury advisory, they may select a second meal of fish from the grocery or a restaurant.

As with all health advice, the consumer needs to consider his or her specific circumstances and the information and basis of each advisory. A diet high in fish provides particular benefits to those with heart disease risk factors (smoking, high blood pressure, family history) and those seeking to lower intake of saturated fats. Those benefits could outweigh the potential risks of adverse health outcomes caused by chemical contamination in the fish consumed.