

North Carolina Women's Hospital

Safety Facts for a Healthy Pregnancy

~ FISH~

When you are pregnant, eating well and taking care of yourself are very important for you and your baby. Fish is a good source of protein. Here is some important information about the safest ways to choose, prepare and eat fish during pregnancy. The 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 chemicals, which can be harmful in pregnancy. Some fish from rivers, lakes and ponds, and large saltwater fish may contain dangerous substances.** Eating fish that have these chemicals could cause birth defects or damage to an unborn or nursing baby. The harmful chemicals are called *methyl mercury and dioxins*.

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 put together guidelines to help women eat fish safely. These guidelines ask pregnant and nursing women to avoid the kinds of fish that contain methyl mercury and dioxins.

Specific recommendations are:

- Do not eat SHARK, SWORDFISH, KING MACKEREL, CANNED WHITE TUNA (ALBACORE TUNA), SPANISH MACKEREL, or TILEFISH.
- Eat no more than one serving (6 ounces) of fish from local rivers, lakes or ponds each 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 PICKEREL)
- Eat no more than two servings (12 ounces) of other fresh or canned ocean fish (like salmon, regular tuna and flounder) or seafood (like shrimp, oysters and clams) each week.

What is the safest way to prepare fish and seafood?

When you are making meals for yourself or your family, follow these guidelines so that you or your family members do not get sick from bacteria that may be present in raw fish or seafood:

- When you are preparing raw fish or seafood, often wash your hands and anything that comes in contact with the fish with hot, soapy water.
- Keep raw fish or seafood away from already cooked fish or seafood. For example, do not put cooked fish on a plate or dish that had raw fish or seafood on it without first washing the plate or dish 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 look for meat that flakes easily.
- Put leftover cooked or raw fish or seafood in the refrigerator or freezer right away. Do not allow this food to stay out of the refrigerator or freezer overnight because it can grow bacteria in just a few 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

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