

# ADVICE ABOUT EATING FISH

For Those Who Might Become or Are Pregnant or Breastfeeding and Children Ages 1 – 11 Years



**Fish‡ provide key nutrients that support a child’s brain development.**

Fish are part of a [healthy eating pattern](#) and provide key nutrients during pregnancy, breastfeeding, and/or early childhood to support a **child’s brain development**:

- Omega-3 (called DHA and EPA) and omega-6 fats
- Iron
- Iodine (during pregnancy)
- Choline

Choline also supports development of the **baby’s spinal cord**. Fish provide iron and zinc to support **children’s immune systems**. Fish are a source of other nutrients like protein, vitamin B12, vitamin D, and selenium too.



**Choose a variety of fish that are lower in mercury.**

While it is important to limit mercury in the diets of those who are pregnant or breastfeeding and children, many types of fish are both nutritious and lower in mercury.

**This chart can help you choose which fish to eat, and how often to eat them, based on their mercury levels.**

**What is a serving?** As a guide, use the palm of your hand.



**Pregnancy and breastfeeding:**  
1 serving is 4 ounces

**Eat 2 to 3 servings a week from the “Best Choices” list**  
(OR 1 serving from the “Good Choices” list).



**Childhood:**

On average, a serving is about:

- 1 ounce at age 1 to 3
- 2 ounces at age 4 to 7
- 3 ounces at age 8 to 10
- 4 ounces at age 11

**Eat 2 servings a week from the “Best Choices” list.**

## Best Choices

Anchovy	Herring	Scallop
Atlantic croaker	Lobster,	Shad
Atlantic mackerel	American and spiny	Shrimp
Black sea bass	Mullet	Skate
Butterfish	Oyster	Smelt
Catfish	Pacific chub mackerel	Sole
Clam	Perch, freshwater and ocean	Squid
Cod	Pickering	Tilapia
Crab	Plaice	Trout, freshwater
Crawfish	Pollock	Tuna, canned light (includes skipjack)
Flounder	Salmon	Whitefish
Haddock	Sardine	Whiting

## Good Choices

Bluefish	Monkfish	Tilefish (Atlantic Ocean)
Buffalofish	Rockfish	Tuna, albacore/white tuna, canned and fresh/frozen
Carp	Sablefish	Tuna, yellowfin
Chilean sea bass/Patagonian toothfish	Sheepshead	Weakfish/seatrout
Grouper	Snapper	White croaker/Pacific croaker
Halibut	Spanish mackerel	
Mahi mahi/dolphinfish	Striped bass (ocean)	

## Choices to Avoid HIGHEST MERCURY LEVELS

King mackerel	Shark	Tilefish (Gulf of Mexico)
Marlin	Swordfish	Tuna, bigeye
Orange roughy		

**What about fish caught by family or friends?** Check for [fish and shellfish advisories](#) to tell you how often you can safely eat those fish. If there is no advisory, eat only one serving and no other fish that week. Some fish caught by family and friends, such as larger carp, catfish, trout and perch, are more likely to have fish advisories due to mercury or other contaminants.

[www.FDA.gov/fishadvice](http://www.FDA.gov/fishadvice)  
[www.EPA.gov/fishadvice](http://www.EPA.gov/fishadvice)



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The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends eating fish as part of a healthy eating pattern.

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends:

- At least 8 ounces of seafood (less for children§) per week based on a 2,000 calorie diet.
- Those who are pregnant or breastfeeding consume between **8 and 12 ounces per week** of a variety of seafood from choices that are **lower in mercury**.



Eating fish can provide other health benefits too.

**Fish intake during pregnancy is recommended** because moderate scientific evidence shows it can help your baby's cognitive development.

Strong evidence shows that eating fish, as part of a healthy eating pattern, **may have heart health benefits**. [Healthy eating patterns](#) that include fish may have other benefits too. Moderate scientific evidence shows that eating patterns relatively higher in fish but also in other foods, including vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, low- or non-fat dairy, lean meats and poultry, nuts, and unsaturated vegetable oils, and lower in red and processed meats, sugar-sweetened foods and beverages, and refined grains are associated with:



**Promotion of bone health - decreases the risk for hip fractures\***



**Decreases in the risk of becoming overweight or obese\***



**Decreases in the risk for colon and rectal cancers\***

A **healthy eating pattern** consists of choices across all food groups (vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, and protein foods, which includes fish), eaten in recommended amounts, and within calorie needs. Healthy eating patterns include foods that provide vitamins, minerals, and other health-promoting components and have no or little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium.

This advice supports the recommendations of the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), which reflects current science on nutrition to improve public health. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* focuses on dietary patterns and the effects of food and nutrient characteristics on health.

§ For some children, the amounts of fish in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* are higher than in this FDA/EPA advice. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* states that to consume those higher amounts, children should only be fed fish from the "Best Choices" list that are even lower in mercury – these fish are anchovies, Atlantic mackerel, catfish, clams, crab, crawfish, flounder, haddock, mullet, oysters, plaice, pollock, salmon, sardines, scallops, shad, shrimp, sole, squid, tilapia, trout, and whiting.

\* There is [moderate scientific evidence of a relationship](#) between the eating pattern as a whole and the potential health benefit.

‡ This advice refers to fish and shellfish collectively as "fish" / Advice revised October 2021