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## THE BENEFITS OF EATING FISH AND SEAFOOD

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Fish and seafood are excellent sources of protein, minerals, and vitamins, and play a role in maintaining a healthy, well-balanced diet. Fish is the best source of Omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential for the development of a fetus.

## CONCERNS ABOUT EATING FISH

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Some fish contain contaminants that can be harmful if you are exposed to large amounts over a period of time. This is a special concern if you are pregnant, planning to be pregnant, nursing a baby, or have a young child.

Over time, your body can build up harmful levels of toxic chemicals. By far, the most common toxic chemical in Georgia fish is mercury. Mercury is especially harmful to a developing child during pregnancy. Exposure to mercury before pregnancy can affect a baby, too.

Contaminated fish may not look, smell, or taste different, but they can still harm you and your child. Women who are or may become pregnant should follow fish consumption advisories. These advisories are designed so that you can still get the benefits of eating fish by wisely choosing:

- safer types of fish,
- safer ways to prepare fish,
- how often you eat fish, and
- how much fish you eat.

## REDUCE YOUR EXPOSURE TO CONTAMINANTS IN RECREATIONALLY CAUGHT FISH

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Choose the type of fish you eat:

- Eat a variety of fish.
- Fish with more fatty flesh (bluefish, striped bass, etc.) tend to collect more contaminants because many contaminants are stored in fat.
- Eat smaller-sized fish (within state size regulation), because older or bigger fish tend to build up contaminants in their bodies.

Consider the source of the fish:

- Avoid eating fish from areas known to have high levels of contaminants.

Follow the consumption advice provided in the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR), "*Guidelines for Eating Fish from Georgia Waters*." The Guidelines provide a list of the fish advisories in Georgia and tips such as:

- If you are given recreationally caught fish, ask where it was caught, what species of fish it is, and check the Guidelines to see if an advisory exists for that particular type of fish.
- If you do not know about the safety of the fish you are eating, consult the guidelines for advisories on similar species or locations near where it was caught.

## CHOOSE HOW MUCH FISH YOU EAT AND HOW OFTEN

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While most fish in Georgia waters are safe to eat, some fish are not safe for pregnant or nursing women or young children to eat in large quantities. The consumption advisories in GDNR's "*Guidelines for Eating Fish from Georgia Waters*." are designed to help you understand the fish species that you should avoid eating, those that you can eat in limited amounts, and fish that you can eat unlimited amounts of.

The booklet is produced annually for release through numerous outlets, including GDNR's State and Regional offices, District and County Health Departments, and popular fishing-related outlets. Information targeting the sport angler is placed in the annual Georgia Fishing Regulations. Both of these are available on GDNR's website: [www.ganet.org/dnr/environ](http://www.ganet.org/dnr/environ).

## PREPARATION AND COOKING GUIDELINES FOR FISH UNDER ADVISORIES

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Since many contaminants are stored in fat, trimming fatty areas before cooking, and cooking in a manner that allows fat to drip away can eliminate most of the contamination. One exception to this rule is mercury, which is stored in muscle tissue and cannot be eliminated by cooking and trimming methods. **See Cooking Tips for Healthier Fish on the back of this brochure.**

## WHAT ABOUT STORE BOUGHT FISH?

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Fish and seafood can contain trace amounts of contaminants, and fish sold in stores and restaurants are no exception. However, fish with lower fat content generally contain fewer contaminants, because most contaminants are stored in fat. One notable exception to this rule is mercury.

Mercury is one of a few chemicals that accumulates in the muscle tissue of fish and, therefore, cannot be eliminated by cooking or trimming methods. Based on U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Food and Drug Administration reports, women of childbearing age are advised to eat no more than one eight-ounce portion of shark or swordfish every two months because these fish can contain mercury. Children under seven are advised not to eat shark or swordfish at all.

It is generally safe to eat low-fat commercial fish and seafood such as flounder, pollock, cod, shrimp, clams, scallops, oysters, mussels, and farm-raised fish, such as catfish and salmon. Consumption advice is usually not necessary for these types of fish.

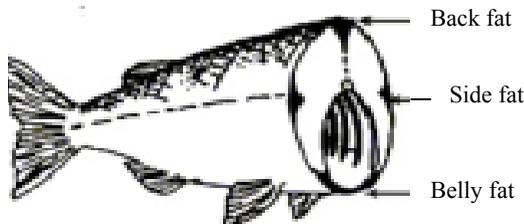
It is also safe for an expectant mother to eat up to eight ounces of canned tuna each week provided she has not eaten any other fish known to be contaminated with mercury that week.

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## **COOKING TIPS FOR HEALTHIER FISH**

You can reduce the levels of contaminants in fish and seafood by following these recommendations:

- Avoid batter or breading, because they hold in liquid that may contain contaminants. Recommended cooking methods include broiling, grilling, roasting, or steaming.
- Eat less fried or deep-fat fried fish because frying seals in the chemicals that might be in the fish's fat.
- Cooking does not destroy chemicals in fish, but heat from cooking melts some of the fat in fish and allows some of the contaminated fat to drip away.
- Bake or broil the fish on an elevated rack that allows fats to drain to the pan below; do not fry in a pan.
- After cooking, discard all liquids. Do not reuse for soup or sauces.
- Before cooking, remove and do not eat the organs, head, skin, and trim all the fat from the belly flap, the line along the sides, the fat along the back and under the skin (see diagram below):



## **HOW TO CONTINUE ENJOYING FISH WHILE PROTECTING YOUR BABY OR YOUNG CHILD**

Some fish in Georgia waters are not safe for pregnant or nursing women or young children to eat. Carefully choose the fish you eat while you are pregnant or nursing, and prior to pregnancy. In addition:

- Discuss the fish you eat with your health care provider.
- Remember to consider ALL sources of fish you eat when making your choices.
- Consider making changes in how you eat fish: the kind of fish you eat, the source of the fish, how much you eat, how often, and how you prepare them.
- Eat a variety of fish.

**For more information on Georgia fish and seafood consumption advisories, contact:**  
**Georgia Division of Public Health**  
**Chemical Hazards Program**  
**(404) 657-6517**

**For information about national fish and seafood consumption advisories, visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at**  
**[www.epa.gov/ost/fishadvice/advice](http://www.epa.gov/ost/fishadvice/advice)**

**For information on commercial fish and seafood, contact the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Seafood Hotline at**  
**(800) FDA-4010**

Chemical Hazards Program  
Division of Public Health  
Georgia Department of Human Resources  
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## **A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO EATING FISH & SEAFOOD**

**Answers  
to  
Common  
Questions...**

**What You Should Know If You Are Pregnant, Planning To Be Pregnant, Or Have A Young Child**



Georgia Department of Human Resources

**Georgia**  
**Environmental Protection**  
Department of Natural Resources