

Mercury in Fish

Mercury, that heavy, silvery liquid metal in thermometers, can find its way into our fish. As mercury enters the air from power plants and other sources, it is changed to a form of mercury called methyl mercury that ends up in our lakes and oceans. Fish who reside in the waterways the longest accumulate the highest levels of methyl mercury by eating lots of smaller fish with methyl mercury. Methyl mercury is a neurotoxin; that is, it affects the brain, particularly the brain of the fetus and newborn.

How should we react to this? The FDA and EPA issued a joint statement in 2004 with three messages. (1) Fish is good to eat. The omega-3 fatty acids protect the heart, and fish should remain in the American diet. (2) Those in high risk groups, especially pregnant women and young children, should consume fish less frequently and choose fish with reduced levels of mercury. (3) The joint statement lists resources where consumers and the general public can find out more information.

So if you are not in the high risk group, you do not need to be concerned. If you are in the high risk group, consume fish that are lower in mercury and in moderation. Remember, fish is good, healthy protein and should not be avoided as many of the substitute protein sources have far more adverse health effects on us.

Resources* (accessed 9/23/05):

Links: EPA/FDA Fish advisory.

<http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish/MethylmercuryBrochure.pdf>

State of Texas Fish advisories on inland lakes and waterways:

<http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/bfds/ssd/fiscount.html>

State of Louisiana Fish advisories:

<http://www.deq.louisiana.gov/surveillance/mercury/>

* If the addresses listed above are no longer valid, try searching the internet by the title of the document and/or author.