



The Maine Family Fish Guide: Advice from the  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention

# Fish: 2 Meals a Week for Good Health

for pregnant women, children, and adults

**Buy**



**Cook**



**Catch**

**Eat Out**



If you're pregnant, this sign means caution.



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### For more information

General information: [maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/eohp/fish](http://maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/eohp/fish)

For health information about mercury in fish or omega 3 oils, call Maine CDC toll-free in Maine: 1-866-292-3474.

Environmental and Occupational Health Programs  
Maine CDC, DHHS, 11 State House Station,  
Augusta, ME 04333, TTY: Call Maine Relay 711  
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# Healthy Fish for Pregnant Women and Families:

## Eat 2 Meals a Week of Different Fish

### *Best Choices*

#### **Seafood High in Omega 3 Oils and Low in Mercury**

- Salmon – fresh and canned  
Try **budget friendly** canned salmon. See recipe on page 10.
- Sardines and Herring
- Smelt
- Atlantic Mackerel
- Mussels

### *Next Best Choices*

#### **Other Seafood Low in Mercury, but Not as High in Omega 3 Fish Oils**

- **Light** Canned Tuna
- Scallops and Clams
- Shrimp – fresh, frozen, canned, from Maine and away
- Flounder and Sole
- Haddock, Hake, Pollock, and Cod
- Imitation Crab or Lobster (This is made from various fish.)
- Lobster – but do not eat tomalley, the green stuff inside the body

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**Why are omega 3 fish oils important?** Omega 3 fish oils are “brain food” for babies in the womb and babies who are nursing. These oils also help protect adults from heart attack deaths. Fish is also a great source of protein, zinc and iron and is low in saturated fat.

**Most farm-raised fish** are safe to eat. See page 9. For farm-raised salmon, see page 10.





## High Mercury Fish to Limit or Avoid

### Advice for Pregnant and Nursing Women, Women Who May Get Pregnant, and Children Under Age 8

**Fish to Avoid:** Pregnant and nursing women, women who may get pregnant, and children under age 8 should NOT eat these 4 fish. They're too high in mercury:



- **Swordfish**
- **Shark**
- **King Mackerel**
- **Tilefish**

These fish are high in mercury because they eat other fish or live a long time. Mercury can damage a brain starting to form or grow. That's why babies in the womb, nursing babies, and young children are at most risk.

**Fish to Limit:** Pregnant and nursing women and children under age 8 may safely eat **one meal per week** of one of these fish. Choose **other** fish listed on page 3 for the other fish meal that week.

- **Tuna steak**
- **White canned tuna (see page 9)**
- **Halibut steak**

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### Advice for Everyone Else

**Fish to Limit:** Other adults and children over age 8 may safely eat up to **2 meals per month** of swordfish, shark, king mackerel, and tilefish. These fish are high in mercury because they eat other fish or live a long time. Too much mercury lowers the heart healthy benefits of omega 3 fish oils.

**Limits on Fish You Catch:** See eating limits for sport caught fish (fish from Maine rivers, lakes, ocean) on page 11.

# Don't Buy Smelly Fish!

## Buy Fresh Fish

- Buy fish in places you trust. Ask when the fish you plan to buy came in. If it's more than a day or two old, choose another kind.
- Check that fish has been properly iced or kept in a refrigerator. Ask to smell it. It should smell fresh and mild, not strong or "fishy."
- Ask for recipes.

## Buy Frozen Fish

- Frozen seafood is just as healthy as fresh. Just make sure the packages are sealed tight, not torn or crushed on the edges. Also don't buy packages covered in frost or ice crystals. This could mean the fish has been stored a long time or thawed and refrozen.
- If you see the letters FAS, they mean **Frozen At Sea**. When you buy FAS fish, it may still be frozen or it may be thawed. It's safe to buy either way.

## Store Fish Safely

- Best to cook and eat, or freeze, **fresh fish** (and thawed FAS fish) within 2 days of purchase. You can safely keep fresh fish that you buy or catch in the freezer for up to 3 months. Mark the date on the package!
- Fish that you **buy frozen** should go right into your freezer when you get home. Don't let it thaw until ready to cook. It can stay in the freezer for up to 3 months.
- If fish smells strong or feels slimy, throw it out. Don't cook it or eat it.



# Healthy Fish for Pregnant Women and Families

Eat 2 Meals a Week of Different Fish

**Fish low in mercury and high in omega 3 fish oils**

**Fish low in mercury**



**Fresh Salmon**



**Smelt**



**Atlantic Mackerel**



**Canned Salmon**



**Sardines**



**Mussels**



**Light Canned Tuna**



**Clams and Scallops**



**Haddock, Hake, Cod and Pollock**



**Lobster**



**Flounder and Sole**



**Imitation Crab and Lobster**



**Shrimp**



## Don't Eat These Fish!

If you are pregnant, nursing, may get pregnant or a child under 8

**Swordfish • Shark King Mackerel • Tilefish**

*Everyone else can eat 2 meals a month of these 4 fish*

**Questions? Call the Maine CDC toll free in Maine: 1-866-292-3474**

## Fish for Dinner: Cook In or Eat Out

**Cook In:** Bake, broil, steam, grill, microwave, or pan-fry fish in a little butter or oil. Cook until well-done but not dry. Color inside should be the same as cooked outside portion.

	<b>Cooking Time</b>	<b>Oven Temp To Bake</b>
Fillet half inch thick or less	About 10 minutes	350 degrees
Thicker fillets	About 20-30 minutes	350 degrees

**To add flavor:** Before you cook fish, sprinkle it with lemon juice, soy sauce, or herbs. Or try seasonings or crumb toppings sold at the market.

### Eat Out: Restaurant and Take-Out Tips

**Imitation crab or lobster is safe** for everyone to eat. It's often used in take-out sandwiches and restaurant seafood salads.

**Seafood chowder, clam chowder, and lobster** are safe for everyone. But, no one should eat lobster tomalley – the green stuff inside the body.

**Sushi** and other raw fish are NOT safe for pregnant and nursing women.



# OK to Eat Tuna, Fish Sticks, and Farm-Raised Fish

## Eat Tuna in Cans or Pouches Safely

Both **light** and **white** tuna have healthy omega 3 fish oils. **White** tuna has more, but it also has more mercury. Pick the kind you and your family like, and follow the steps below.



Tuna Pouch

### Step 1: Read the label. Find

- if the tuna is **light** or **white** and
- the can or pouch size.

### Step 2: Consider meal size.

- For kids under age 8, a tuna meal is 3 ounces or less.
- For kids age 8 and over and adults, a tuna meal is 6 ounces or less.

### Step 3: Know how many tuna meals per week are safe.

- For pregnant and nursing women, women who may get pregnant, and children under age 8
  - **Light** tuna — 2 meals per week OR
  - **White** tuna — 1 meal per week
- For all other adults and children age 8 and older
  - **Light** tuna — 2 meals per week OR
  - **White** tuna — 2 meals per week



Canned Tuna

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## Fish Sticks: Safe to Eat, Not as High in Omega 3 Oils

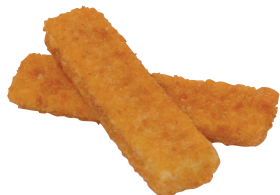
Fish sticks and other frozen, breaded fish products are safe for everyone to eat up to twice each week. But they cost more and are not high in omega 3 oils.

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## Farm-Raised Fish

Some fish are raised in enclosed pens called “farms.” Fish commonly raised this way include catfish, tilapia, trout, shrimp, and mussels.

**These fish are safe to eat.** They are low in mercury and other pollutants because they don't eat other fish.



Fish sticks

[Farm-raised Salmon: Next Page →](#)



# Salmon: 3 Choices for Taste, Health and Budget

## Canned Salmon – Easy on the Budget

The price of canned salmon varies by type of salmon and whether bones have been removed. Low cost brands are as healthy as higher priced brands. Try using canned salmon in place of tuna in salads, sandwiches, and over rice and noodles.

### When you open the can:

- 1) Drain the liquid
- 2) Peel off and discard any black skin
- 3) Remove or crumble any bones.



Canned Salmon



Salmon Patties

## Recipe: Quick Salmon Patties or Baked Salmon Loaf

Mix together:

- 1 can salmon (about 14 ounces)
- 2 eggs (beat them just a little before mixing with salmon)
- 1 small onion chopped up fine
- 1/2 cup bread or cracker crumbs
- 1/2 teaspoon of seasoning you like, such as dill, parsley, thyme
- 1/2 cup of chopped crispy vegetable like celery or green pepper

**For salmon patties:** Form the mixture into small patties like burgers. Fry in a little oil, medium heat, about 5 minutes on each side.

**For salmon loaf:** Press the mixture into a small greased pan like a meatloaf. Bake at 350 degrees for about 45 minutes.

**Wild Alaskan Salmon** is low in pollutants. You can buy it in cans, sometimes fresh, and over the internet.

**Farm-Raised Salmon:** Most of the fresh salmon in stores and fish markets is farm-raised. It does contain some pollutants that come from the food the fish eat. These same pollutants are in meat and dairy products. The health benefits of omega 3 oils in farm-raised salmon make it worth eating up to once a week. Meat and dairy products are not rich in omega 3 oils.



Fresh Salmon

# Fish You Catch in Rivers, Lakes, or the Ocean

Enjoy sport fishing? Here's advice about eating the fish you catch.

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## Healthy Sport Fish for the Whole Family

- Atlantic Mackerel
- Sea-run Smelt (Atlantic Smelt)

Everyone, including pregnant women and young children, can enjoy these 2 fish. They're low in mercury and high in omega 3 oils.

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## Sport Fish With Eating Limits

- Freshwater Smelt (Lake Smelt)
- Landlocked Salmon
- Brook Trout

Limits for **pregnant and nursing women and children under age 8:**

1 meal per month

Limits for **everyone else** (other adults and children age 8 and older):

1 meal per week

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## Sport Fish With Very Strict Eating Limits

All other fish, including

- Pike and Pickerel
- Large and Smallmouth Bass
- White Perch
- Lake and Brown Trout
- Striped Bass and Bluefish



**Pregnant and nursing women and children under age 8 should NOT eat these fish. All other adults and children age 8 and older may eat up to 2 meals per month.**

*If you don't see your favorite sport fish listed, call us: 1-866-292-3474.*



“Our family eats  
2 tasty fish meals  
each week on  
a budget.”



## Sample Fish Meals For a Month

### Week 1

- Canned light tuna for lunch on Tuesday
- Frozen shrimp stir-fry for dinner on Friday

### Week 2

- Salmon for dinner on Monday (salmon on sale)
- Fish chowder at a public supper on Saturday night

### Week 3

- Sandwich with imitation crab for lunch on Tuesday
- Canned light tuna for lunch on Friday

### Week 4

- Haddock sandwich for lunch on Wednesday
- Salmon loaf for dinner on Thursday (see recipe page 10)

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		🐟			🐟	
	🐟					🐟
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			🐟	🐟		

## How much fish is a fish meal?

A fish meal for those age 8 and over is about 4 ounces of fish—the size of a deck of cards. Younger children will eat less. It's best to eat a variety of fish instead of just one kind.

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**Want to know more?**  
**Give us a call at the Maine CDC**  
**Tollfree: 866-292-3474**