

## **Fish good, Mercury bad!**

By Gilbert Woolley/ Special To The Tab  
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**F**ish and other seafoods are excellent foods, low in fat, but rich in protein and Omega 3 fatty acids. Nutritionists advise that eating seafood regularly is good for your health and parents should encourage their children to eat this healthy food.

A number of seafoods, however, are heavily contaminated with mercury. Unfortunately, one of the most popular and affordable fish products, canned albacore tuna, is one of them. Mercury is a potent “neurotoxin”(it poisons the nervous system) and is especially harmful to the developing brains and nervous systems of young children and of the fetus in the womb. This can cause learning difficulties, delay mental development and the effects may be lifelong. To be safe, small children, pregnant women and women who may become pregnant (mercury persists in the blood for up a year) should not eat canned albacore (white”) tuna or tuna steaks. Moderate amounts of “light” tuna are OK.

The website of the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) advises that these sensitive groups should not eat swordfish, shark, king mackerel, grouper, tilefish and other large “predator fish” (fish that eat other fish) The Advisory states that pregnant women may eat up to six ounces of albacore tuna per week. Since the effects of mercury are so serious, several non-governmental organizations say that this far too high. So, why risk the brain of your child or unborn child? “Light” tuna has five or six times less mercury than albacore but it is still significant.

Mercury pollution of the oceans is a worldwide problem. The US contributes to it but is not, by any means, the only offender.

Fresh water fish may also be contaminated by mercury and Massachusetts advises pregnant women not to eat freshwater fish caught in the waters of the state. This mercury comes mostly from the smokestacks of coal-burning power plants, many located hundreds of miles away in Ohio and other coal mining states. Mercury is present in much of the coal mined in the US. When burned, it is released into the atmosphere in the form of vapor and carried down wind to the Northeast. Only the federal government can protect Massachusetts, but the federal government is proposing to relax standards for mercury emissions.

### **How much is too much?**

- A 115 pound woman who consumes two cans of albacore tuna a week has a “mercury in blood” level more than three times that recommended by the FDA.
- A 45 pound child eating one can of albacore tuna a week would have more than four times the FDA recommended level

The “Sea Turtle Restoration Project” has a “seafood mercury calculator” on its website (<http://www.gotmercury.org>)

If you want to know more about mercury in tuna, do a “Google Search” on the two words “mercury” and “tuna”. You will get more information than you may have time to read.

*Gilbert Woolley is a retired engineer. He has been a very active member of the Sierra Club since 1971, and he served on the Sierra Club National Toxics Committee for six years.*

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