FOOD SAFETY TIPS
You have a role in food safety!
Bacteria multiply on food that is mishandled and some of these bacteria may cause disease. By making sure the food you buy and prepare remains safe, you can play an important role in reducing the risks of foodborne illness.

Buyer be aware!
Examine food and its packaging at the store - if it leaks, have it repackaged - and again at home. Avoid swollen or leaking cans, or damaged packages - they may expose the contents to bacteria.
Select perishable foods last and put them away first - surface bacteria begin to multiply as soon as food surfaces warm.

Canadian Food Inspection Agency
Fact Sheet

FOOD SAFETY FACTS ON MERCURY AND FISH CONSUMPTION

Fish are an excellent source of high-quality protein and are low in saturated fat which makes them a healthy food choice. However, certain types of fish should be eaten in moderation because mercury levels in those fish sometimes exceed Canada’s mercury guideline. Health Canada advises consumers to limit their consumption of swordfish, shark or fresh and frozen tuna to one meal per week. For young children and women of child-bearing age, the recommended limit for swordfish, shark or fresh and frozen tuna is one meal per month. Note that this restriction does not apply to canned tuna.

What is mercury?
Mercury is a naturally-occurring element which is found in soil and rocks and also exists in lakes, streams and oceans. In addition to natural sources, mercury is released into the environment by human activities such as pulp and paper processing, mining operations, and burning garbage and fossil fuels.
We absorb small amounts of mercury from a number of sources, both natural and artificial, in our immediate environment. These include amalgam dental fillings, air and water pollution, and trace amounts in food. Of the different kinds of food we eat, fish is usually the largest source of mercury.

It is well known that high amounts of mercury can damage the nervous system of people and animals. In trace amounts, however, the effects are not clearly known. Long-term studies are being conducted to determine the effects of low levels of mercury, especially on young children.

Mercury in fish
Mercury exists in two different forms, the organic and the inorganic. In the aquatic environment, the most prevalent form of mercury is methyl...
Store it right!
Keep the refrigerator at 4°C (40°F) or less. Keep the freezer at -18°C (0°F) or less.

Keep it clean!
Always clean your hands, utensils and cooking surfaces thoroughly. Wash your hands with soap and hot water before you handle food, repeatedly while you prepare it, and again when you’ve finished. Clean (soap and hot water) and sanitize (bleach and water) cutting boards and utensils after use.

Clean (soap and hot water) and sanitize (bleach and water) countertops, cutting boards and utensils with a bleach solution (5mL/1tsp. bleach per 750mL/3 cups water). This will kill surface bacteria.

When in doubt, throw it out!
Examine food carefully immediately before you use it.
Look for damaged packaging, obvious mould growth, discoloration and unusual odours, feel and texture.

mercury, the organic form, which binds tightly to the proteins in fish tissue. Most fish have trace amounts of methyl mercury. The level of mercury found in a fish is related to the level of mercury in its aquatic environment and its place in the food chain. Mercury tends to accumulate in the food chain, so large predatory fish species tend to have higher levels than non-predatory fish or species at lower levels in the food chain.

Health Canada’s guideline for total mercury content in commercial marine and freshwater fish is 0.5 parts per million (ppm). It was first set in the 1970s and, based on a recent re-evaluation, is still considered appropriate to protect the health of Canadians from the toxic effects of methyl mercury. The Canadian limit is more stringent than the limits set in many other countries, for example the United States, where the limit (for methyl mercury alone) is 1.0 ppm.

The CFIA's role
The CFIA regularly tests commercial fish and shellfish to determine if it meets the Canadian mercury guideline and to establish baseline levels for particular species in particular aquatic environments. Laboratory tests of marine fish consumed in Canada consistently show that average mercury levels are well below the 0.5 ppm limit, with the exceptions of swordfish, shark, and fresh and frozen (not canned) tuna. Since most marine fish species are well below the limit, there are no restrictions on their consumption. This includes the most commonly consumed fish and seafood, such as salmon, cod, pollock, sole, shrimp, mussels, scallops and canned tuna.

The CFIA continues to regularly test both exempted and non-exempted species for mercury.

Exempt species and limits on consumption
Certain fish species sold in Canada, namely, shark, swordfish, and fresh and frozen tuna, contain mercury at levels that are known to exceed the 0.5 ppm guideline. Mercury levels for these species generally remain between 0.5 and 1.5 ppm, allowing for occasional consumption. Therefore, these species (Note: not canned tuna) are exempted from the 0.5 ppm guideline and, in their case, another risk management strategy is followed, namely, issuance of advisories recommending appropriate restrictions on (amounts and frequencies of) consumption. In this way, these species can continue to be enjoyed by consumers as part of an occasional diet.

Consumption of shark, swordfish and fresh and frozen tuna should be restricted to one meal per week. For young children, pregnant women, and women of child-bearing age, consumption should be limited to one meal per month. Because of the nutritional value of fish, these species continue to be available to Canadian consumers, with advice to limit consumption to avoid
Make sure it's thawed right!

Thaw foods in the refrigerator. Thawing in cold running water or in a microwave oven is also acceptable. Thawing at room temperature is unsafe because surface bacteria begin to multiply as soon as the surface warms.

Cook foods right!

Prepare foods quickly, cook them thoroughly and serve them immediately. Don't let potentially unsafe foods linger at temperatures where bacteria can grow. The "danger zone" is between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F).

Don't spread it around!

Keep certain foods, like meats and their juices, separated from others during storage and preparation.

Rinse and sanitize dish clothes often and use separate dish towels for each part of the kitchen (one for each counter) so as not to spread bacteria. Keep a separate cutting board for meat.

It is important to note that this exemption does not apply to canned tuna. The species used in canned tuna tend to be smaller and shorter lived than those used in the fresh and frozen market; therefore, the level of mercury found in canned tuna tends to be lower than that of fresh and frozen tuna.

Freshwater fish

Levels of mercury in freshwater fish vary according to the lake or river system from which they are harvested, and as with marine fish, predatory species tend to have higher levels than non-predators. All commercial, freshwater fishing areas are surveyed and where high levels are found, they are closed to commercial fishing or restrictions are placed on catching and marketing certain species.

With regards to recreational fishing, it is normally the responsibility of provincial governments to monitor mercury levels and to set and publicize safe consumption standards and guidelines. For more information regarding the safety of recreationally-caught freshwater fish for consumption, contact provincial authorities.

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Keep foods covered. Flies, other insects or accidental splashing during preparation of other foods can introduce bacteria.