

Nutrition Facts

Fish Intake During Pregnancy and Breastfeeding



The Benefits of Eating Fish

Fish is a great source of protein, and other nutrients like iron, zinc, vitamin B₁₂, and vitamin D. Fish is the best food source of omega 3 fats. It is a healthy food to eat during pregnancy because pregnant women need more of these nutrients. Health Canada recommends that pregnant and breastfeeding women eat fish or shellfish twice per week (150 grams).

Omega-3 Fats: Essential Fats

Omega-3 fats are called essential fats because your body is unable to make them, so they must come from your diet. There is evidence that eating fish regularly during pregnancy helps with baby's brain, nerve and eye development. Women of childbearing age are encouraged to eat foods high in omega-3 fats before and during pregnancy, and during breastfeeding.

Types of Omega-3 fats:

EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid): found in fatty fish and shellfish, such as salmon, anchovies and trout.

DHA (docosahexaenoic acid): found in fatty fish, shellfish and omega-3 eggs.

ALA (alpha-linolenic acid): found in plant-based foods such as ground flax seed, hemp seeds, flax seed oil, soybean oil, canola oil and walnuts.



How much do I need?

Pregnant women need 1.4 grams of omega-3 fats per day, and breastfeeding women need 1.3 grams of omega-3 fats per day. The best sources come from fatty fish. The rest of the omega 3 fat needed can come from ALA or plant-based sources, such as oils, nuts and seeds.

The Best Sources of DHA Omega-3 Fats

- salmon (Atlantic, wild, canned)
- herring (Atlantic)
- sardines
- omega 3 eggs
- mackerel (Atlantic)
- trout
- anchovies



Other sources of Omega 3 fats:

- canola oil
- flaxseed oil
- non-hydrogenated canola or soybean oil margarine
- walnuts
- ground flax seed



Mercury in Fish

While all fish contains some mercury, large predatory fish contain higher amounts that may be harmful to your unborn or breastfed baby. These fish are **shark, swordfish, escolar, marlin, orange roughy and fresh/frozen tuna**. **Intake of these types of fish should be limited to no more than 150 grams (5 ounces) per month**. For more information on mercury in fish visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-safety/chemical-contaminants/environmental-contaminants/mercury/mercury-fish.html>

There are Ontario recommendations on **sport fish**, which vary depending on the lake and the size of the fish. The Guide to Eating Sport Fish is available at: http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/environment/en/resources/collection/guide_to_eating_ontario_sport_fish/STDP_ROD_075994.html

Canned tuna

Canned tuna is safe to eat in pregnancy. Canned “light” tuna is lower in mercury than “white” (albacore) tuna, because it contains other types of tuna (such as skipjack, yellowfin, and tongol) which are all low in mercury. Pregnant and breastfeeding women should not have more than 300 grams or about **2 cans per week** of albacore canned tuna.



Omega 3 Supplements

Try to get your omega-3's from food before turning to supplements. But if you don't like fish or if you are a vegetarian, you might need an omega-3 supplement (made from fish or algae oil). Check with your health care provider and pharmacist. Make sure the supplement you use has a Natural Product Number (NPN) on the package. This means the product is safe, effective and of high quality. Your daily dose of fish oil supplement should not contain more than 3 grams of EPA plus DHA.

References

Government of Canada. 2014. Omega-3 fatty acids and fish during pregnancy. <http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/health-sante/pregnancy-grossesse/omega-3-eng.php>
Health Canada. 2011. Mercury in Fish – Questions and Answers. http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/secureit/chem-chem/environ/mercur/merc_fish_qa-poisson_qr-eng.php#ca6

Revised April 2019