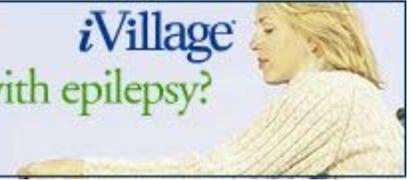


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Americans advised to eat seafood twice a week

REUTERS
HEALTH INFORMATION

Dec 23 (Reuters Health) - New guidelines recommend that all Americans -- especially pregnant and nursing women and children -- eat seafood twice a week, despite the current concern about pollution contamination.

The guidelines summarize scientific findings presented at a conference held in Washington, D.C, reiterating that seafood helps people live longer and healthier lives, and cuts the risk for heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's, stroke, diabetes, and inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.

The conference was sponsored by the governments of the United States, Norway, Canada, and Iceland, and assisted by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. The recommendations are summarized in a statement issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA.

Nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, iodine, iron and choline, present in fish such as wild and farmed salmon, shrimp, pollock, cod, canned light tuna and catfish, are important in brain development and may lessen the effects of dyslexia, autism, hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder, researchers have found, and some studies have linked those nutrients with increased intelligence in infants and young children.

Regarding the concern about mercury contamination, the NOAA statement advises: "Women will not put their baby at risk if they avoid eating shark, swordfish, tilefish, king mackerel, tuna steaks and whale meat until after they have delivered and stopped breast feeding." For good measure, women planning to become pregnant should avoid these fish for six months beforehand.

The recommendations have a 10-fold safety margin built in for precaution, which some scientists think is scaring people away from seafood. "This margin might make people continue depriving their families and their children of the benefits of consuming seafood," William E. M. Lands, a retired Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Michigan and the University of Illinois, and an expert in the field of the metabolism of fats, phospholipids, and prostaglandins, told Reuters Health.

Evidence presented at the conference showed that selenium, another element present in ocean fish, neutralizes the effects of mercury acquired from foods. "This very important, but little analyzed, point helps us understand how people from the Seychelles islands can eat fish 12 times per week and show no toxic signs," Lands said. "The subtle toxic signs seen in places like the Faroe Islands now seem attributable to mercury being ingested in mammalian meats (pilot whale) that have much lower selenium than mercury."

"Not eating seafood is more harmful than eating it," Lands concluded. "The benefits of eating seafood far outweighs the risks of the little bit of mercury that are in the seafood."

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