

< tentative translation from Japanese original >

## **Advice for Pregnant Women on Fish Consumption and Mercury**

2 November, 2005

Subcommittee on Animal Origin Foods  
Food Sanitation Committee  
Pharmaceutical Affairs and Food Sanitation Council  
MHLW, Japan

### **Benefit of fish and shellfish**

Fish and shellfish are an important part of a health diet and contain good nutritional properties. Compared with other foods, they contain more high-quality protein and highly-unsaturated fatty acids, such as EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) and DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), which are known to be beneficial for brain development and the prevention of lifestyle-related disease. Also, they are good sources of micronutrients, such as calcium.

### **Mercury in fish and shellfish**

Regardless of habitat area, fish and shellfish contain traces of mercury as a result of the food chain transfer. Its levels are generally too low to pose health effects. Yet, some fish and shellfish contain higher levels of mercury as a result of food chain biomagnification.

### **Advice for pregnant women**

Recently, some reports have said that a mother's intake of mercury through fish and shellfish consumption may have health effects on the fetuses. These effects are no more than degree, for example, auditory response is delayed by less than one-thousandth second, and its intake through normal meals will not badly affect the baby's future life. However, in order to reduce the health risk to the minimum, women who are or may be pregnant should follow (keep in mind) the recommendations, given below, when they eat fish and shellfish.

The Japanese average daily intake of mercury from foods is about 60 percent of the tolerable daily intake for the pregnant women, which has been published by the Japanese Food Safety Commission. The intake of mercury through normal foods will not pose a health concern to unborn babies.

1) Fish and shellfish are an important part for a nutritionally well-balanced diet, which is necessary for healthy pregnancy and childbirth. 2) This advice is intended not to ask the pregnant women to avoid fish and shellfish that contain high levels of mercury, 3) but to advise them to refrain from a large consumption particularly of fish and shellfish that are higher in mercury and to benefit from them by reducing the risk from mercury.

Recommendations for pregnant women to select and eat fish and shellfish

Recommended amount (muscle)	Kind of fish and shellfish
Up to about 80 grams (average 1 meal) per 2 months (10 grams/week)	Bottlenose dolphin
Up to about 80 grams (1 meal) per 2 weeks (40 grams/week)	Short-finned pilot whale
Up to 80 grams (1 meal) per week* <sup>1</sup> (80 grams/week)	Alfonsino Swordfish Bluefin tuna Bigeye tuna Finely-striate buccinum Baird' beaked whale Sperm whale
Up to 160 grams (average 2 meals) per week* <sup>1</sup> (160 grams/week)	Yellowback seabream Marlin Hilgendorf saucord Southern bluefin tuna Blue shark Dall's porpoise

Note: 1) The amount (80 grams) refers not to the weigh of each kind listed but the sum of the weights of all kinds of fish and shellfish eaten.

If you eat two or three kinds of fish out of those listed in the same category in a week you should eat a half or a third of the recommended amount for each kind. If you eat more than two meals, you should also cut back the amount consumed at a time, according to the frequency of consumption.

2) You can eat other tune species than listed ones and canned tuna without any particular restriction.

3) The average weight of fish and shellfish according to consumption-form:

*Sushi* and *sashimi* 1 unit: 15 g

*Sashimi* 1 serving: 80 g

Fish cutlet 1 serving: 80 g

**Advice for people other than pregnant women**

This advice is intended to protect the health of unborn babies. Children and other adults than the pregnant women are unlikely to have a health risk from mercury in fish and shellfish they eat normally. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is advising these people to eat a variety of fish and shellfish, which can contribute to the maintenance of good health, without only eating particular kinds of fish and shellfish.

**For correct understanding**

Fish and shellfish are generally beneficial for human health. The MHLW expects that this advice will gain proper understanding so that it will not lead to the reduced consumption of fish and shellfish or the spread of harmful rumor. The MHLW is going to review the advice, in step with the advance of science and technology.