



LAKE WHITEFISH

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH – CONTAMINANTS FACT SHEETS

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LAKE WHITEFISH?

Lake whitefish are found throughout mainland Northwest Territories in lakes and rivers. They have a narrow, silver body. Larger fish develop a distinct hump behind their head. Lake whitefish have a light, sweet flavour.

Whitefish, like most other fish species, often contains some mercury. Mercury is a heavy metal contaminant (see

Mercury fact sheet- <http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca>) that can build up in the organs and in the meat.

Whitefish eat plankton, snails and insects. Whitefish do not eat other fish. Fish that do not eat other fish tend to have lower levels of mercury.

LAKE WHITEFISH IS GOOD FOR US!

Lake whitefish is an excellent source of protein. Protein is needed to build and repair all parts of the body. It is also a source of healthy fats, called omega-3 fatty acids, and provides more than most other fish species in the North. These fats help to keep the heart healthy and are good for brain development.

Whitefish is also rich in selenium. Selenium helps to protect the body from damage that occurs over time, called oxidative stress. Oxidative stress is unavoidable and is a natural part of how the body works, which is why we need this important mineral.

For more nutritional information on fish, see the GNWT Health and Social Services Nutritional Food Fact Sheets Series (<http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca>).

IS LAKE WHITEFISH SAFE TO EAT?

Yes! Whitefish are safe to eat. They are also some of the healthiest foods available. The benefits of consuming whitefish are much greater than the risks of contaminant exposure. In 2007, the NWT Chief Public Health Officer

issued consumption advice to limit the intake of lake whitefish from a contaminated lake. This has since been lifted.

