



General Fish Consumption Guidelines for the NWT

Why eat fish?

Eating fish contributes to a healthy, nutritious diet. Fish is an excellent source of protein, calcium, minerals, and omega-3 fatty acids which help maintain your health!

How much fish should I eat each week?

Canada's Food Guide recommends at least two servings (equal to 150 grams, 5 ounces or 1/3 of a pound) of fish each week as a part of a healthy, balanced diet.

Can fish be contaminated by chemicals in the environment?

Fish, like other foods, can contain varying levels of chemical contaminants such as mercury. An environmental contaminant is any chemical in a food that would not normally be present. Environmental contaminants can result from human releases of contaminants to the environment, or from natural activities which allow contaminants to enter the food chain.

Are these contaminants harmful?

The mere presence of a contaminant may not always be harmful. Small amounts of mercury can also be found in fish bought in the supermarket or caught in the wild.

Do some fish contain more contaminants than others?

Predatory fish that feed on other fish and reach a large size – like walleye, lake trout and northern pike – may contain levels of mercury in excess of consumption guidelines. Other fish species – like whitefish, cisco, suckers, grayling, Arctic Char, and inconnu – generally have very low levels of mercury, even in larger fish.

Should pregnant women eat fish?

Regular fish consumption by pregnant women and nursing mothers is overall beneficial for healthy prenatal and early childhood development.

Fetuses, infants and young children are particularly sensitive to the effects of mercury. Unless there are specific fish consumption guidelines for a particular lake, women who are pregnant (or maybe pregnant), nursing mothers, and children under 12 are advised to limit their predatory fish consumption of lake trout and northern pike that are less than 60 cm (or 24 inches), and walleye that are less than 45 cm (18 inches), to a single serving per week. These groups are also advised to avoid lake trout and northern pike larger than 60 cm (or 24 inches) and walleye larger than 45 cm (or 18 inches).

Non-predatory fish are a good choice for women of child bearing age and children in terms of mercury exposure. Consuming fish contributes to a healthy, nutritious lifestyle. Women who eat fish are encouraged to continue breastfeeding to provide infants the best start to a healthy life.

For specific fish consumption guidelines on NWT lakes that have been tested for contaminants please visit the GNWT Department of Health and Social Services website at <http://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/health/environmental-health/mercury-levels-fish>.

For more information on fish species and regulations, consult the 2016/2017 NWT Sport Fishing Guide at http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/sites/default/files/nwt_sport_fishing_guide_2016-2017.pdf.

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