

What can you do to reduce your exposure AND prevent mercury from contaminating fish?

- ◆ Avoid eating fish high in mercury such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish and limit consumption of all other fish, especially albacore tuna and fresh tuna.
- ◆ Avoid purchasing products that contain mercury
- ◆ Recycle your old mercury-containing products.
- ◆ Support the Thermostat Collection Act WVE is introducing in the 2009 Montana legislative session. This legislation will reduce the amount of mercury released to our environment by establishing a collection program for mercury thermostats.

Additional Resources

- ◆ Women's Voices for the Earth, www.womenandenvironment.org
- ◆ Confused about which fish are safe to eat? Download a Safe Fish Wallet Card at <http://www.nrdc.org/health/effects/mercury/walletcard.pdf> to help you select fish low in mercury.
- ◆ For Federal Fish Consumption Guidelines, visit www.epa.gov/mercury/advisories.htm
- ◆ To find a recycling location for mercury products near you visit <http://earth911.com/>



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Mercury: What Every Woman Should Know



Mercury is a dangerous toxic chemical that is stored in the body's tissues and fats and builds up in the body over time.

The major source of human exposure to mercury is through eating contaminated fish.

An estimated 1 in 6 women in the United States have high enough levels of mercury in their blood to put their infant at risk of neurological disorders.

A pregnant woman who has mercury in her body can pass it to her developing child across the placenta. Once her child is born, she can pass it to her baby through breastfeeding. Older children and adults can be exposed to mercury by eating contaminated fish.

Health effects in children exposed to mercury include neurological disorders such as learning disabilities and developmental retardation, memory and vision impairment, among others. Children are more vulnerable to the toxin because their nervous systems are still developing.

Adults exposed to mercury may experience trembling hands and numbness or tingling in lips, tongue, fingers or toes. Other physical symptoms include fatigue, joint pain and mental instability. High levels of exposure can also damage the heart, nervous system, or kidneys.



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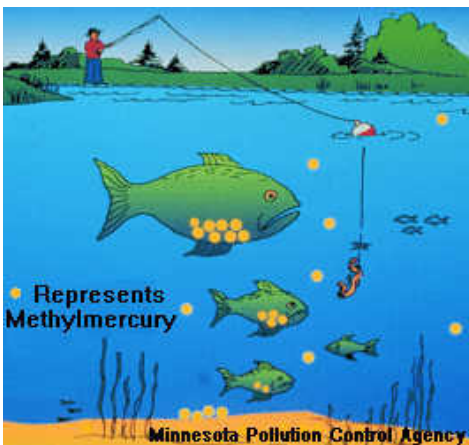
How Does Mercury Get Into the Fish You Eat?



Sources such as coal-fired power plants, cement kilns and chlorine plants all emit mercury into the air. This mercury settles to the ground and contributes to the pollution of water sources, like a lake or river, where the toxin is then absorbed by fish.

Some consumer products, like non-digital thermostats, also contain mercury that can contaminate the air or water when broken. This may happen accidentally in a home, school, or office—or it may happen after the product is thrown into the trash.

When mercury reaches an aquatic environment, such as a lake or stream, it can be transformed into methylmercury, an extremely toxic form of mercury that biomagnifies, or builds up, in the food chain. For example, fish absorb



more mercury than they can eliminate; as a result mercury concentrations increase at each level of the food chain. So fish farther up on the food chain will have higher concentrations of mercury because of all the little fish they have been eating. The same is true for humans. Because we are at the top of the food chain, we tend to eat bigger fish that are more likely to have higher levels of mercury.




Is there mercury in fish in Montana?



Yes. Federal test of fish caught in eight Montana lakes found that every fish sample tested was contaminated with mercury.

- ◆ 54% of fish tested contained mercury levels that exceeded the federal safe limit for women of childbearing age
- ◆ The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services recommends that women of childbearing age should avoid eating all lake trout, northern pike, and walleye over 15 inches in length, and should limit their intake of most other lake fish caught in Montana.

Types of mercury products and available alternatives

Product	Amount of Mercury	Alternative
Thermostat 	5 grams or more	digital thermostat
Compact Fluorescent Light Bulb (CFL) 	Less than 5 milligrams	LED bulbs*
Thermometers 	~1 Gram	digital thermometers

*Currently there is no viable alternative to fluorescent lights (LED bulbs do not contain mercury but are expensive. The use of fluorescent lamps should not be avoided—they save energy and reduce mercury emissions from coal-fire power plants.