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# A Woman's Guide to Eating Indiana Fish

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## What You Should Know if You Are:

**Pregnant**

**Planning to Be  
Pregnant**

**Breastfeeding  
a Baby**

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## Choosing Where to Fish

You can protect yourself by fishing tested waters. The Indiana Fish Consumption Advisory (IFCA) includes information about fish from the lakes and rivers that have been tested for chemicals. You can obtain a free copy of the IFCA from the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH), or you can access the information from the ISDH Web site. (Please refer to the Additional Sources of Information section of this brochure for ordering information.)

You will know more about the safety of fish from tested lakes and rivers than waterways that have not been tested. If you are uncertain about the safety of fish where you are fishing, a safer choice may be to release your catch.

## Choosing Fish

Over time, your body can rid itself of some contaminants. You can help this process by eating smaller amounts of fish or eating certain types of fish. Some fish in Indiana lakes and rivers are not safe for pregnant, breastfeeding women, or children under age 15 to eat. (This information is included in the IFCA.) Contact information about store-bought fish is available and can be found in the Additional Sources of Information section of this brochure.

## Cooking Fish

Mercury cannot be removed from fish. However, the way you cook fish can make a difference in the amount of PCBs you consume. Broiling, grilling, roasting, or steaming fish is recommended. Frying breaded fish is not recommended for larger, fatty fish. Throw away drippings; do not make soup or gravy with the liquid.

## Eating Fish Is Good for You!

- Fish is a good source of protein that is low in saturated fats.
- Fish is the best source of Omega 3 fatty acids, an important and heart-healthy compound that the body needs.

**However**, some fish contain harmful chemicals. This can cause concern for women who are pregnant, planning to be pregnant, or breastfeeding. According to a survey conducted by the Indiana State Department of Health\*, almost 35 percent of women between the ages of 21 and 40 eat fish caught in Indiana waterways. We hope to increase this percentage by providing more and better information about sport-caught fish.

\*Fish Consumption Advisory Booklet Survey, Aug-Sept, 2002

## What Chemicals Are in Indiana Fish?

Several chemicals are found in Indiana waters and fish. In fish, two of particular concern are mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). They can build up in fish, especially in fish that eat other fish.

**Mercury** is a metal which does not break down but recycles between land, water, and air. Some mercury reaching Indiana waters occurs naturally. Mercury is also released from coal-burning power plants and from burning household and industrial waste.

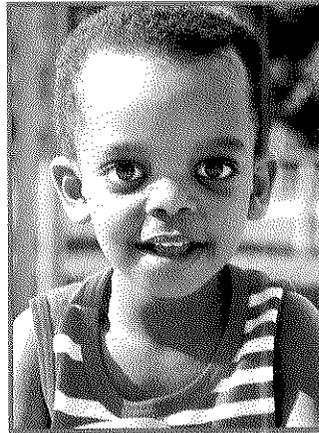


**PCBs** are synthetic oils once widely used in industrial processes and products. PCBs break down very slowly in the environment. PCBs collect in the soil, water, sediment, and in very tiny (microscopic) animals. They build up in fish, especially in fish that eat other fish. Although PCBs are no longer manufactured or used in industry, they do remain in nature and can cause health problems.

## Impact on Infants and Small Children

Harmful levels of PCBs and mercury can build up in your body without your being aware of it.

These chemicals can be passed to a developing fetus during pregnancy and to an infant through breastfeeding.



Mercury can damage the nervous system. In high amounts, mercury can cause severe mental and physical retardation in a baby. Low amounts can delay walking and talking and can cause other effects, such as learning problems.

PCBs may cause physical problems. Babies exposed to PCBs during pregnancy may have lower birth weight, smaller head size, and delayed physical development. As a result, these babies can develop learning and memory problems that are difficult to detect until the children are older. Exposure to PCBs may also cause cancer.

## **Prevention Is the Best Advice**

A woman's exposure to these chemicals before pregnancy matters. Women should follow the fish consumption advisory for pregnant women several years before becoming pregnant. It takes up to one year for the body to get rid of mercury and six years or more to get rid of PCBs.

Men should also avoid exposure to mercury in fish to minimize accumulation in the body.

## **How to Reduce Your Exposure to Chemicals**

### **Choosing the Type of Fish**

The amount of chemicals in fish builds up from the water they live in and from the food they eat. Older or bigger fish have had more time to build up chemicals in their bodies.

Fish that eat other fish, such as the largemouth bass, tend to have higher levels of mercury.

Fish with more fatty flesh, such as carp and catfish, tend to collect more PCBs, because PCBs are stored in fat.



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Indiana State  
Department of Health

**Additional Sources of Information:**

Indiana Fish Consumption Advisory (**IFCA**):

Environmental Epidemiology

317.351.7190, Ext. 262

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/18888.htm>

**Store-bought (Commercial)  
Fish Information:**

<http://fn.cfs.purdue.edu/fish4health>

**Other Related Information:**

<http://www.americanheart.org>

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/sea-mehg.html>

**Enjoy fishing and eating good fish!**