

Tips for Healthier Eating

PCBs, dioxin, mirex, DDT, chlordane and dieldrin are found at higher levels in the fat of fish. You can reduce the amount of these contaminants in a fish meal by properly trimming, skinning and cooking your catch. Remove the skin and trim all the fat from the belly flap, the line along the sides, and the fat along the back and under the skin (see diagram below). Cooking or soaking fish cannot eliminate the contaminants, but heat from cooking melts some of the fat in fish and allows some of the contaminated fat to drip away. Broil, grill or bake the trimmed, skinned fish on a rack so that the fat drips away. Do not use drippings to prepare sauces or gravies.

These precautions will not reduce the amount of mercury or other metals. Mercury is distributed throughout a fish's muscle tissue (the part you eat), rather than in the fat and skin. The only way to reduce mercury intake is to eat less contaminated fish. Also, try to space out your fish meals. For example, if the advice is that you can eat up to four meals a month, don't eat them all in the same week. This is particularly important for women and young children.



When deciding which fish to eat, choose smaller fish within a species since they may have lower contaminant levels. Older (larger) fish from the same species may be more contaminated than smaller fish because they have had more time to accumulate contaminants in their bodies. (But make sure to follow New York State Department of Environmental Conservation [NYSDEC] regulations about fish length: www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/fishing.html).

Further Information

New York State Department of Health advisories are available online at www.health.ny.gov/fish. For more detailed fish advisory information call 518-402-7800 or 1-800-458-1158 or email:

BTSA@health.state.ny.us

For more information on contaminant levels in fish, shellfish and wildlife contact: New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Fish and Wildlife, 625 Broadway, Fifth Floor, Albany, NY 12233-4756

How to Get Involved

Everyone should be involved in the cleanup process of Onondaga Lake, particularly those who live, work, and play nearby. It is important to voice your concerns and opinions when decisions are being made about the environment in which you live. For more information, and to become more involved in local environmental issues, contact any one of the following:

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation,
Region 7
315-426-7403
dec.ny.gov

Onondaga County Department of Water
Environment Protection
315-435-6820
ongov.net/wep

Atlantic States Legal Foundation
315-475-1170
aslf.org

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Health Advice on Eating Fish from Onondaga Lake



Why Health Advisories?

Onondaga Lake, immediately north of Syracuse, has a long history of industrial pollution. While the lake has been dramatically improved in recent years, contaminants remain in the sediments. Because of this, fish that live in the lake accumulate unhealthy amounts of certain chemicals in their bodies.

Fishing is fun and fish are an important part of a healthy diet. Fish contain high quality protein; essential nutrients, healthy fish oils, and are low in saturated fat. However, some fish contain chemicals at levels that may be harmful to health. To help people make healthier choices about which fish to eat, NYSDOH issues advice about eating sportfish (fish you catch).

People can get the benefits of fish and reduce their exposures to chemicals, by following the NYSDOH advice. The advisories tell people which fish to avoid and how to reduce their exposures to contaminants in the fish they do eat. These chemicals build up in the body over time. Health problems that may result from these contaminants range from small changes in health that are hard to detect to birth defects and cancer. Women who eat highly contaminated fish and become pregnant may have increased risk of having children who are slower to develop and learn. These chemicals may have a greater effect on developing organs in young children or in unborn babies. Some chemicals may be passed on in the mother's milk.

These fish are the least contaminated sportfish in Onondaga Lake, and are the BEST choice for eating



Brown Bullhead: Eat up to 4 meals per month
Contaminants: Mercury, PCBs



Pumpkinseed: Eat up to 4 meals per month
Contaminants: Mercury, PCBs



Important: Women under 50 and children under 15 should NOT eat any fish from Onondaga Lake or the Seneca River up to Lock 24 (Baldwinsville)



Carp: **Don't eat**
Contaminants: PCBs, Mercury, Dioxin



White Perch: **Don't eat**
Contaminants: PCBs, Mercury, Dioxin



Largemouth Bass (over 15 inches): **Don't eat**
Contaminants: Mercury, PCBs



Channel Catfish: **Don't eat**
Contaminants: PCBs, Mercury, Dioxin



Smallmouth Bass (over 15 inches): **Don't eat**
Contaminants: Mercury, PCBs



Snapping Turtle: **Don't eat**
Contaminants: PCBs



Walleye: **Don't eat**
Contaminants: Mercury, PCBs

Snapping turtles retain contaminants in their fat, liver, eggs and, to a lesser extent, muscle. If you choose to consume snapping turtles, you can reduce your exposure by carefully trimming away all fat and discarding the fat, liver and eggs prior to cooking the meat or preparing soup. Women of childbearing age, infants and children under the age of 15 should AVOID EATING snapping turtles or soups made with their meat.

The advice for all fish not listed here is to eat up to one meal per month

1 meal = 1 half pound