

U.S. Tuna Foundation

About the US Tuna Foundation

The US Tuna Foundation (USTF) was established in 1976 to serve as an umbrella organization representing the various interests of the U.S. canned tuna industry, including the U.S. distant water tuna fleet and the U.S. canned tuna branded processors (Star-Kist Foods, Bumble Bee Seafood and Chicken of the Sea International).

The USTF represents the international and domestic interests of the industry on numerous issues from fishing access arrangements, to federal and state regulations, to national legislation, to domestic marketing.

We work closely with international tuna conservation organizations to ensure that tunas used in our canned and pouched products remain a healthy and viable renewable resource. In addition, we work closely with national, state and local governments and agencies on a diverse range of issues, including consumer friendly labeling, product quality, dolphin-safe fishing, nutrition and marketing, and science and health.

The USTF also works to promote relevant scientific studies regarding tuna as well as the numerous and important health benefits that tuna affords all Americans.

The U.S. canned tuna industry is proud to provide consumers a low cost, healthy and safe protein product that is high in essential vitamins and minerals.

Anne Forristall Luke, President

Anne Forristall Luke joined the USTF in May 2006. As President, Ms. Forristall Luke ensures that the 103 year old tuna industry has its interests effectively represented. She is able to do so after a successful career in government relations and public affairs, the last three as a principal at MGN, Inc., an independent federal government relations firm in Washington specializing in legislative and regulatory strategy. At MGN, Ms. Forristall Luke advised corporate, trade association, municipal government and university executives on legislative proposals and advocacy. Before joining MGN, Ms. Forristall Luke led the public affairs practice at a leading international public relations company, where she specialized in environmental, financial services and health policy issues.

Ms. Forristall Luke also brings to USTF a deep knowledge of the workings of government, having started her career in the Land and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. She then spent ten years as a senior professional staff member in the U.S. House of Representatives, including six years as legislative assistant, legislative director and subcommittee staff director to a former Congressman, and four years on the staff of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

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Frequently Asked Questions about Tuna

1) Do the benefits of eating fish outweigh the risks of exposure to mercury or other contaminants?

Yes, a 2005 study from the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis shows that the benefits of consuming fish far outweigh the risk calculable from minimal exposure to mercury.

The study's risk and benefit analysis found that consumers who eliminate fish from their diet risk a higher incidence of stroke and heart disease. In addition, the babies of expectant moms who stop consuming fish lose the benefits omega-3s have on brain and nervous system development. Instead, researchers suggested consumers should follow government advice to eat fish weekly, choosing from a variety of fish low in mercury – including canned light tuna, shrimp, salmon, pollock, and catfish – so they can enjoy the health benefits associated with omega-3 fatty acids without concern about mercury exposure.

2) I've heard omega-3s in fish are good for the heart. Why is this true?

Fish is a good source of protein and most varieties are free of or very low in saturated fats, which can contribute to high blood cholesterol levels. Many types of seafood contain “good” kinds of fats, which are unsaturated fats, like omega-3 fatty acids.

Doctors at Harvard Medical School have found evidence to suggest that the omega-3 fats in certain types of fish can stop dangerous irregular heart rhythms, which can trigger heart attacks or sudden death. This study is one of the latest to highlight the potential health benefits of eating fish. Numerous other studies have shown that omega-3 fatty acids can protect against heart disease and stroke. For these reasons, the American Heart Association recommends eating fish at least two times per week.

3) What are omega-3 fatty acids and why are they called “essential fatty acids?”

Omega-3 fatty acids are a form of polyunsaturated fats, one of three basic types of fat that the body derives from food. (Saturated fat and monounsaturated fat are the others.) All polyunsaturated fats, including the omega-3s, are increasingly recognized as important to human health. However, the body cannot produce them on its own. For this reason, omega-3s must be obtained from food sources like fish, thus making these fats “essential.”

It's critical to include at least two fish meals per week in a balanced diet to get the best quality omega-3s while enjoying a delicious, low calorie, high protein food.

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4) Doesn't tuna contain dangerous levels of mercury?

No. Canned tuna is safe. In fact, on January 20, 2006 the FDA confirmed that canned albacore tuna contains eight times less mercury than the government's permitted limit.

5) Can methylmercury be removed from fish?

No. Mercury has always existed in small amounts in fish and other foods. Some natural sources of mercury include volcanoes, cracks in the earth's crust, forest fires, and others. In fact, according to research conducted by Alaska public health officials, eight 550-year-old Alaskan mummies (four adults and four infants) that were tested contained levels of mercury twice as high as pregnant Alaskan women today. The researchers concluded that the remains "provide evidence that humans have always been exposed to naturally occurring mercury through fish and marine mammals in their diets."

6) Who should be concerned about methylmercury exposure from fish?

Experts recommend that women who are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or nursing consume less of certain types of seafood than recommended for other adults. If you are a woman of childbearing years and are concerned about how to keep fish in your diet during your pregnancy, consult the FDA/EPA Joint Advisory on Mercury in Fish and Shellfish.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists endorses the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advisories, telling pregnant women they should not eat certain fish with high levels of mercury during pregnancy. That includes shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish.

7) As a pregnant woman, should I keep fish in my diet?

Absolutely! According to the FDA/EPA Advisory, "Fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet. Fish and shellfish contain high-quality protein and other essential nutrients, are low in saturated fat, and contain omega-3 fatty acids. A well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fish and shellfish can contribute to heart health and children's proper growth and development. So, women and young children in particular should include fish or shellfish in their diets due to the many nutritional benefits."

Furthermore, researchers at the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis recently found that pregnant women, who are at more risk from mercury exposure, could increase the cognitive development benefits for their unborn child by eating the recommended servings of fish per week, while choosing from a variety of fish and seafood low in mercury.

In addition, a number of clinical and research studies suggest that omega-3 fatty acids, in particular DHA, are vital for cognitive function (the ability to perceive and interpret information correctly) – especially as people age – and for other brain functions. DHA may also help to combat depression.

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8) I'm NOT pregnant, nursing or thinking of becoming pregnant. Do I need to worry about what fish I eat?

In short, NO. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), not one single American has been adversely affected by mercury exposure from fish. Fish is an important part of a healthy, balanced diet. In fact, in its Dietary Guidelines and Food Pyramid, the U.S. government prominently features recommendations for Americans to eat at least two weekly servings of fish in their diets. Proteins, vitamins and fatty acids found in seafood contribute to improved cardiovascular and neurological health as well as healthy development in children.

9) The FDA set a limit for mercury in fish, but what does it mean?

Mercury levels for most fish range from non-detectable to 0.5 parts per million (ppm). In a few species, mercury levels can reach 1 ppm, the limit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) suggests for fish intended for human consumption. However, the average concentration in the 10 most popular commercial species is 0.12 ppm or about 8 times lower than the FDA limit.

10) Is fish really “brain food?”

Indeed it is. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, if Americans followed the FDA/EPA advisory and ate 2 meals of fish a week (12 ounces) our cumulative national IQ would rise by about 410,000 points.

11) Can't too much tuna cause brain damage to unborn children?

On the contrary, according to a study at the Harvard Medical School a higher consumption of tuna is beneficial for infant cognition. The more fish a woman eats during her second trimester, the better her 6-month old performed on a standard test of mental development. In fact, babies' scores on the test climbed by 4 points for each weekly serving of fish their mothers had during their second trimester.

Furthermore, researchers at the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis recently found that pregnant women, who are at more risk from mercury exposure, could increase the cognitive development benefits for their unborn child by eating the recommended servings of fish per week, while choosing from a variety of fish and seafood low in mercury.

12) There are a lot of conflicting opinions out there. Who should people believe?

People should believe the facts. And a good place to start is with our government's public health experts. If people have questions they should go right to the source at www.fda.gov.

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The History of Tuna

The tuna industry began in 1903 by accident. Sardines were the fish of choice then, but one day they just disappeared. So, an enterprising Southern California canner, Albert P. Halfhill, decided to pack the empty cans with albacore, which at that time was considered a "nuisance" fish with no known commercial value. As a result, the first cans of tuna were hand-made and squared off, like the typical sardine can.

Once consumers began to try canned tuna, they liked the white meat fish and more canneries began to pack tuna instead of sardines. By 1913, nine plants were in operation, producing 115,000 cases annually. In 1917, there were 36 canners along the California coast. However, getting sufficient supplies of albacore tuna from the Pacific Coast proved difficult, so the leading canners approached M. O. Medina (a local fisherman) and asked him to fish for tuna far south of San Diego. Along with his brothers, Medina headed south and loaded their boat to the brim with yellowfin, skipjack tuna and bluefin, leading to the birth of San Diego's high seas tuna fleet.

But what really put the canned tuna industry on the map was World War I. During this time, U.S. troops needed a convenient protein-rich food and canned tuna provided a ready solution. To meet the extra demand, commercial fisherman – who had originally fished the coastal waters off south California – expanded northward and westward and by the late 1930's, had reached the waters off the Pacific Northwest and several hundred miles offshore. With this increased supply of various tuna species, by 1954, the United States had become the world's largest producer and consumer of canned tuna products.

The latest development in producing canned tuna took place in 2000, when vacuum-packed pouches were introduced. Through this new technology, consumers now have access to an easy-to-store, easy-to-open and easy-to-clean up food. At the same time, tuna processors have added marinated flavors to canned and pouched tuna, enabling the category to provide more choice to the consumer and better variety.

Through this hundred-year history, the U.S. canned tuna industry continues to innovate and respond to the changing needs of Americans consumers. As a result, Americans enjoy canned tuna so much that they eat over one billion pounds of canned or pouched tuna annually. And since canned tuna is such a convenient, tasty and inexpensive source of low-fat protein, it is likely that canned tuna will remain a favorite food of people of all ages.