**Pregnant Safe Sources of Omega-3 Fats**

By Susan Moores, MS, RD Published March 30, 2017

Omega-3 fats are essential fats, meaning you can only get them from your diet. If you're pregnant, they may take on a greater level of "essential-ness." Many studies suggest these fats, particularly eicosapentaenoic acid, or EPA, and docosahexaenoic acid, or DHA, bring several benefits to both moms-to-be and the babies they carry.

Fish is the richest source of DHA and EPA, but most Americans eat very little fish. The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends women who are pregnant or breastfeeding consume at least 8 ounces per week of DHA-rich seafood low in mercury. This amount is associated with improved infant health outcomes. Too much mercury in the body during pregnancy can harm a developing baby's brain and nervous system.

#### Benefits vs. Risk

Fish is an excellent source of protein, provides several vitamins and minerals, and is low in saturated fat — all of which are good attributes for being healthy. Omega-3s ramp up the health aspects for pregnant women by potentially reducing the risk of premature delivery and improving brain and vision development in the baby.

#### What's a Pregnant Woman to Do?

In 2016, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Environmental Protection Agency released an ["Advice About Eating Fish" chart](https://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/Metals/ucm393070.htm) to help women and parents understand good seafood choices. The initiative recommends all women of childbearing age, especially those who are pregnant or breastfeeding, consume 2 to 3 servings of fish per week from the "best choices" list, which includes catfish, cod, salmon and sardines. Choices to avoid are highest in mercury levels and include shark and swordfish.

What about vegetarians? Because of DHA's beneficial effects on reducing the risk of premature delivery and improving infant brain and vision development, pregnant vegetarians should choose DHA-fortified foods or eggs from hens fed DHA-rich microalgae or use a microalgae-derived DHA supplement. For more information about appropriate supplement use, consult your doctor.