

Food for Thought

What About Mercury and Tuna?

by Marcus Guiliano, Owner & Chef, Aroma Thyme Bistro

(With this article, we welcome a new contributor to **Wawarsing.Net**. Marcus, 31, grew up in Ellenville, and has been the chef of five-star restaurants in New York, Colorado, and London, ran restaurants at three country clubs, and has written 200 recipes for three of health guru Gary Null's books. His columns will focus not only on food, but also on well-being and living better.)

There are many recent questions and concerns regarding mercury levels in tuna. Here's the Reader's Digest version of what's going on.

Mercury is a naturally-occurring element, and is found in trace quantities in air, water, and all organic matter. There are two forms of mercury that exist in nature – inorganic mercury and methyl mercury. The latter is the variety we are primarily concerned with here. Methyl mercury in fish is either absorbed via the gills, or ingested through food sources. Ultimately, mercury is one of those things that organisms can't process and expel very well. Therefore, generally speaking, the older (and often larger) the organism, the higher the mercury level.

Once again, rarely are there any absolutes in nature, and this is no exception. Habitat, diet, and age all play equally important roles in determining mercury levels, and sweeping generalizations should not be made. Regrettably, sweeping generalizations have been made. For example, let's take the popular claim: "Tuna is high in mercury."

Unfortunately, that statement is painted with far too broad a brush. I've no doubt that a 1,200 pound Bluefin tuna (*T. thynnus*) has mercury levels well above the standards established by the FDA, as would a large Mako Shark (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), or a big swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*). These are all examples of what are known as pelagic species. A pelagic fish is one that spends the majority of its time away from the coast, near the top of the water. These are species that should be avoided if you wish to steer clear of seafood with high mercury content.

In a recent mercury study, the FDA posted its findings on mercury content in all types of tuna as just... "Tuna." Regrettably, nobody took the time to draw distinctions between the varieties of tuna that are common to the market. Our Oregonian troll-caught albacore weigh in at around 12-18 pounds apiece, and although they are (relatively speaking) quite young, they are a species which develops rapidly and reaches sexual maturity at a very early age. All of our Oregon albacore has tested well below the FDA's recommendations for acceptable mercury levels. Nutritionally, a seven-ounce portion contains over 50 grams of protein, and 4.2 grams of Omega-3 fatty acids.

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