

UNSAFE TO EAT

Living in a thick liquid atmosphere, fish readily absorb the pollution in the world's waterways. Research shows that fish can accumulate up to nine million times the concentration of toxins (like PCBs and DDT) from the waters in which they live. When people eat fish, they ingest these deadly poisons and store them in their fat cells. Fish also absorb mercury that is released as toxic emissions from coal-burning power plants.

The most dangerous concentrations accumulate in the flesh of large predators like shark, swordfish and albacore tuna — some of the most widely consumed fish. The FDA and EPA now warn pregnant women and nursing mothers that eating too much of these fish puts their unborn children at risk for neurological damage¹.



"Farmed" fish are no healthier to eat, since they swim in filthy water and are so sick they must be fed massive doses of antibiotics to be kept alive. People consume these chemicals when they eat farmed fish.

Nutritionally, fish is lower in fat than other types of meat, but it also packs about twice the cholesterol per calorie as pork or beef. (Plant foods, by contrast, contain no cholesterol.) Cholesterol buildup in the arteries is the main cause of cardiovascular disease, the number one killer in the U.S., taking more lives than the five next most common causes of death combined².

Omega-3, an essential fatty acid that regulates body tissue functioning, is present in both fish and some plant foods. For example, flax is a rich plant-based source of Omega-3 that can be found in health food stores or purchased inexpensively on the internet.

PLUNDERING THE OCEANS

Over the last half century, the fishing industry has developed technological "advances" to increase its catch, which now exceeds 100 million tons annually³. Fisheries use sonar and satellite-tracking equipment to locate schools of fish, and cover miles of ocean with gigantic driftnets that lay waste to complex deep-sea ecosystems. Another common technique is "longline fishing," in which a fishing line up to 60 miles long is embedded with thousands of hooks and trailed behind a single boat. These indiscriminate methods are to the ocean what clear-cutting is to forests, or what strip-mining for minerals is to the earth.

Species that are not economically valuable (such as sea turtles, dolphins, and sea lions) are discarded: over 27 million tons of aquatic animals are thrown, dead or dying, back into the ocean every year³. Other species like seals and birds are hunted and killed because they would otherwise consume lucrative fish, eating into the fisheries' profits.

Overfishing and wasteful slaughter have ravaged marine ecosystems to the point where many species are declining rapidly and some even face imminent extinction. A recent study that analyzed data from five ocean basins collected since the 1950s reports that 90% of each of the world's large ocean species (including cod, halibut, tuna, swordfish and marlin) have disappeared from the world's oceans in recent decades⁴.

Aquaculture (intensive breeding of fish on "farms") has been touted as the solution to chronically depleted stocks, and produces about 36 million tons of fish per year³. Crowded into caged enclosures, "farmed" fish live in water that is infested with bacteria which forms from a surplus of excrement. This can trigger algal blooms that suffocate or poison the fish. The fecal waste and the chemicals used to treat the water then contaminate fragile coastal estuaries where aquaculture operations are often built.

FISHING HURTS FISH

Based on a review of over 500 research papers, biologists reported in the August 2003 issue of *Fish & Fisheries* that fish are highly intelligent and socially sophisticated: they can recognize individual shoal mates, learn from each other, employ long-term memory, and even use tools. Other scientific studies confirm that fish have a complex nervous system and can feel physical pain⁵. Fishing causes unnecessary suffering by either violently removing fish from their natural habitat or raising them in unnatural and unhealthy conditions; in either case, their lives are taken so that a human can eat their flesh.

"Fish are sensitive, they have personalities, they hurt when they're wounded."

~ Dr. Sylvia Earle, former chief scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Some argue that "fish eat other fish — they're going to die anyway, so we may as well eat them!" However:

- Ecologically, "fish eating other fish" does not cause species to go extinct — pollution and overfishing do.

- Fish suffer *more* from being caught in nets or on hooks than by other fish. While being eaten by a predator is a relatively quick process lasting minutes if not seconds, fish can survive for *several hours* after being caught in nets or on hooks.



Humans *don't need* to eat sea creatures to survive, but certain aquatic predator species *do*. In fact, we don't need to eat animals at all to live long and healthy lives. It is this realization that leads compassionate people to ask, is killing other living creatures for food ethically defensible when we can so easily choose to eat a delicious plant-based diet?

WHAT TO EAT



Not only are there plenty of delectable options among the fruits, vegetables, grains, beans and nuts of the world, but

you can also find veggie "fish" made of soy or other non-animal ingredients at most health food stores and on the menus of many vegetarian restaurants. You can also make foods on your own that taste like fish.

If you still eat fish, please think about the information in this brochure and consider reducing the amount of fish you eat. Better yet, you can become a vegetarian, improving your own health and conserving natural resources while reducing the amount of suffering in the world every time you eat.

Being a vegetarian is not as difficult as most people think. As an advocacy organization, Bay Area Vegetarians is committed to promoting the many benefits of a vegetarian lifestyle. Through our email list serve, you can connect with the local vegetarian community and stay informed of activities throughout the Bay Area. If you've already decided to go vegetarian or vegan and need support, our mentorship program offers direct, personalized guidance from experienced vegans to help you make the transition with ease and at your own pace. Membership in Bay Area Vegetarians is free, and signing up is easy! You can learn more about us and vegetarianism by visiting our website. Thanks for your concern!

– Mat Thomas

Visit our website for great recipes and more information on transitioning to a vegetarian diet.

Also sign up for our
Veggie Mentor Program

Bay Area Vegetarians
PO Box 371215
Montara, CA 94037
www.bayareaveg.org



REFERENCES:

1. What You Need to Know About Mercury in Fish and Shellfish - 2004 EPA and FDA Advice For Women Who Might Become Pregnant, Women Who are Pregnant, Nursing Mothers, Young Children (March 2004).
2. American Heart Association. *Heart and Stroke Statistical Update: 2004 Update*. Dallas: American Heart Association.
3. Amounts of aquatic animals caught/discarded/raised every year worldwide - www.yannarthusbertrand.com/us/clterre/part8/chap5/clt01.htm
4. Myers, R & Worm, B. Net losses: Industrialized fishing hits fish stocks. *Nature*, 15 May 2003.
5. Rose, J. The Neurobehavioral Nature of Fishes and the Question of Awareness and Pain. *Reviews in Fisheries Science*, 101-38 (2003).

But you eat FISH,

DON'T you?



Fish is often the last animal that people eat on their way to becoming vegetarian. Maybe people eat fish because they think it's a "healthy" meat, unaware that it can actually be harmful. Many don't realize that industrialized fishing is decimating the ocean, or that fish feel pain just like humans and other animals do.

Incredulous meat eaters therefore often ask vegetarians, "But you eat fish, don't you?" The answer is no, vegetarians don't eat *any* animals, regardless of whether they walk, fly, or swim. The reasons people choose to be vegetarian vary, but tend to focus on concern for their own health and the survival of others (animals, the planet, starving people).

Inside this brochure you will find evidence of the dangers that eating fish poses to people, the environment, and the fish themselves. Please take a few minutes to consider these crucial issues with an open mind.

**Bay Area
Vegetarians**
www.bayareaveg.org