

## **MERCURY IN SEAFOOD: CAN WE INFLUENCE THE MESSAGE?**

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Mercury remains a potential toxin of concern in consumption of aquatic foods, but recent changes in the supply and nutritional benefits of seafood should be considered in composing advisories that are more current and relevant for the products and audiences of concern. Facts for consideration include; 1) the recent and historical shift in the available and affordable supply of seafood that favors more aquacultured selections that are less prone to mercury exposure and bioaccumulation than the precautionary species of wild, higher-order predatory fish that are more subject to limitations and harvest restrictions; 2) the persistent concerns for particular sources of wild fish available through both recreational and some limited commercial harvest from enclosed, freshwater locations that should be distinguished from the prominent seafood supply; 3) further emerging evidence for the more immediate nutritional benefits of seafood consumption, for both neonatal and elder populations, relative to the calculated predictions for adverse consequences from prolonged, multi-years consumption of certain fish; and 4) the progressive drift in content and mode of delivery of the advisory message. Most advisories are founded in reference to the joint guidance issued by EPA and FDA, but many alter and confuse the message with addition of more species, multiple categories and degrees of avoidance, and blending with concerns for resources and environmental issues or sustainability. Likewise, some well intended advisories have been directed to youth and special needs groups without accounting for comprehension or application relative to their social or economic situations. They provide no preliminary or post evaluations for impact. Many result in false warnings, errant interpretation and spill-over effects that deter choices that would otherwise provide healthful benefits. This situation calls for reconsideration of the message. Data and predicted supply trends suggest a new message that distinguishes sources relative to site-specific situations and recreational vs. market selections, and encouraging variety in consumption rather than single species avoidance.