

7 Healthy Facts about Eating Iowa Fish

From the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Iowa Department of Public Health

1. Fish Are Part of a Healthy Diet.

Fish are low in saturated fat and contain protein, calcium, iron, zinc and many vitamins. Eating fish can contribute to a healthy heart, the prevention of diseases and a child's proper growth. The Iowa Dept. of Public Health recommends eating two meals of fish per week.

2. Iowa-Caught Fish Are Safe to Eat, In Almost All Cases.

Some people have concerns about whether fish are safe to eat because of chemicals that may be present. Chemicals in the water can occur naturally or because of human impacts such as industrial pollution. The vast majority of Iowa's streams, rivers and lakes offer safe and high-quality fish that pose little or no threat to human health if consumed.

3. Iowa DNR Tests for Chemicals Regularly.

The Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR), in cooperation with U.S. EPA, annually tests for chemicals in samples of fish from selected lakes and rivers in Iowa. In the rare cases when chemical levels are found to be elevated, fish consumption advisories are issued according to protocol developed by the Iowa Dept. of Public Health.

4. Advisories Are Limited to Specific Water Bodies.

Of the thousands of miles of rivers/streams, along with hundreds of lakes in Iowa, only a small handful currently has consumption advisories. Advisories are printed in the DNR annual fishing regulations, or can be viewed at the DNR website.

5. Advisories Suggest Limits, Not Elimination.

Even where safety advisories occur, it does not mean all fish should be avoided. Instead, advisories will either recommend **limiting fish consumption to one meal per week**, or to avoid eating **certain types of fish** from that specific location. Despite these warnings, the Dept. of Public Health recommends eating fish from a variety of sources to achieve the most health benefits. *In fact, Iowa's safety advisories offer stricter consumption guidelines than those placed on fish purchased from grocery stores and restaurants.*

6. Pan Fish are Different from Predator and Bottom-Feeding Fish.

Chemical concentrations, if present, tend to be higher in bottom-feeding fish such as catfish or carp. Mercury, if present, tends to be higher in predator fish such as walleye, bass and northern pike. Consumption advisories typically focus on these species. **Pan fish** such as crappie and bluegill carry **virtually no risk**.

7. If You Are Pregnant, Planning to Become Pregnant, Nursing, or Under Age 12, Special Cautions Apply.

For Iowa-caught fish, people in these categories should limit their consumption of predator fish (walleye, bass, etc.) to one meal per week. They should also limit or eliminate the consumption of several grocery-store fish offerings such as tuna, shark and swordfish.