

# Ask Dr. Pete

*I have been eating tuna sandwiches for lunch for a long time and recently read an article about the dangers of mercury in fish. Is there anything I can do for my health at this point?*



*Peter J. Muran, MD*

Over the past fifty years mercury levels have increased in humans. The sources of mercury include older, large fish, such as tuna and sword fish, that have consumed a lot of other fish, silver dental fillings/amalgams, pesticides, seed coatings and water sources contaminated by quicksilver mines.

There are two important problems with mercury, accumulation and toxicity. Mercury accumulates in the tissue of animals and humans and is not excreted freely.

The second problem, toxicity, is a very real and a politically hot topic. The implications of chronic low dose mercury exposure resulting in high tissue mercury levels appear to have a direct effect on cellular metabolism and development. Some conditions that have been implicated by chronic high tissue mercury levels are central and peripheral neuropathy (including Autism and Alzheimer disease), autoimmune disease, hormonal disorders, alopecia and cardiovascular disease. A study by the National Institute of Health, NIH, demonstrated that the fetus could have 70% higher blood levels of mercury than the pregnant mother. In the United States during the year 2000, it is estimated that over 300,000 newborns exposed in utero to levels of methyl mercury higher than those allowable by the EPA standards were at risk for adverse neurodevelopment defects.

The detection of mercury can be reliably determined from using an agent that can attach to the mercury in the tissue and excreted from the body. This is called mercury analysis by provocation. Hair analysis is not always reliable or readily repeatable. The use of various plant chelators is effective for people who have a low level of mercury. If high levels of mercury are determined then a more rigorous removal process is needed. Not all mercury elimination processes are the same and if not done properly the mercury can actually be relocated within the body to form a higher concentration in the brain. Anyone who suspects that they have high levels of mercury as determined by their history of exposure or related chronic symptoms should contact a physician who is well versed in mercury elimination to first determine their level of toxicity and the appropriate treatment plan that will reduce their mercury load. Mercury elimination can be significant in preventing the development of future chronic health problems.



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