

## Before You Go Fish, get the dish...

*By Karen Crawford MS, RD, CSP*

Fish and Shellfish can be a great addition to your family's diet. These foods are great sources of quality protein, essential nutrients, omega-3 fatty acids and are low in saturated fat. They can add variety and heart healthy benefits to your child's diet that may be experiencing fatigue. However, there are better fish and shellfish choices than others for your children due to a mineral present called Mercury. Mercury is naturally found in the environment and falls from the air into bodies of water. Fish then absorb the mercury and the levels can build up, higher in some fish than others.

Most all fish and shellfish contain some amount of mercury, and for healthy adults, mercury intake is of little concern. But for kids, too much mercury can be harmful to their developing bodies. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recommendations for intakes of fish and shellfish for kids and pregnant women based on mercury levels found in certain varieties. In fact, the FDA recommends that kids DO NOT eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish at all!

*So, which fish and shellfish are lower in mercury and therefore better choices for your children?*

<b>Shrimp</b>
<b>Canned Light Tuna</b>
<b>Salmon</b>
<b>Pollock</b>
<b>Catfish</b>

To glean the nutritional benefits of fish and shellfish, it's recommended to work 12 ounces a week, of the lower mercury types, into your child's diet. Fish sticks found in the freezer section of the grocery store or served at quick serve restaurants are typically made with fish that is lower in mercury. If your family does consume higher levels of mercury during one week, you can cut back the next week to balance it out. Harmful effects from mercury could arise if high levels were consumed on a consistent basis over a longer period of time.

The nutritional profile of fish is excellent and can be made part of a well balanced healthy diet. Just use caution when selecting fish and shellfish types and serve in moderation. Go Fish!