

Seafood offers vital nutrient for expectant moms and babies

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(HealthDay)—Omega-3 fatty acids, found in foods including fatty fish

and flaxseed, may be best known for their link to heart health, but they're also vital for pregnant women and their babies.

These important nutrients have been linked to a reduced risk for depression for mom and a better birth weight for baby along with improved development and brain function, and possibly asthma prevention. What's unclear is exactly how much you need every day.

For a study in Spain, researchers followed nearly 2,000 moms and their babies from the first trimester of pregnancy through the child's 5th birthday.

The investigators found that eating large amounts of [fatty fish](#) during pregnancy may offer moderate benefits, including improvements in cognitive functioning and some protection from autism-spectrum traits. The benefits were seen when mom ate about three ounces of fish every day. This amount is just within the limits set by the European Food Safety Authority to avoid excess mercury, and there was no sign that mercury or other pollutants associated with fish had a [negative effect](#) that offset the apparent benefits.

The amount of fish recommended in the Spanish study is more than the U.S. Food and Drug Administration weekly guidelines for [pregnant women](#) of a maximum of 8 to 12 ounces (about two to three servings) of a variety of seafood low in mercury. But many American women fail to get even that much, posing a health risk to their baby, according to research published in the journal *Nutrients*.

There are many safe sources, such as salmon (wild when possible), anchovies, sardines, farmed trout and mussels, to enjoy. Skip more questionable ones due to their mercury content.

Fish to Avoid

- Bigeye tuna
- King mackerel
- Marlin
- Orange roughy
- Shark
- Swordfish
- Tilefish

If you're not eating enough fish, taking supplements could fill the [omega-3](#) gap. Talk to your doctor about the right amount for you.

More information: The FDA has more on [the best seafood choices](#) for women during their childbearing years.

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