Missing Out: How Fish Advice May Be Costing Our Kids Brain Power

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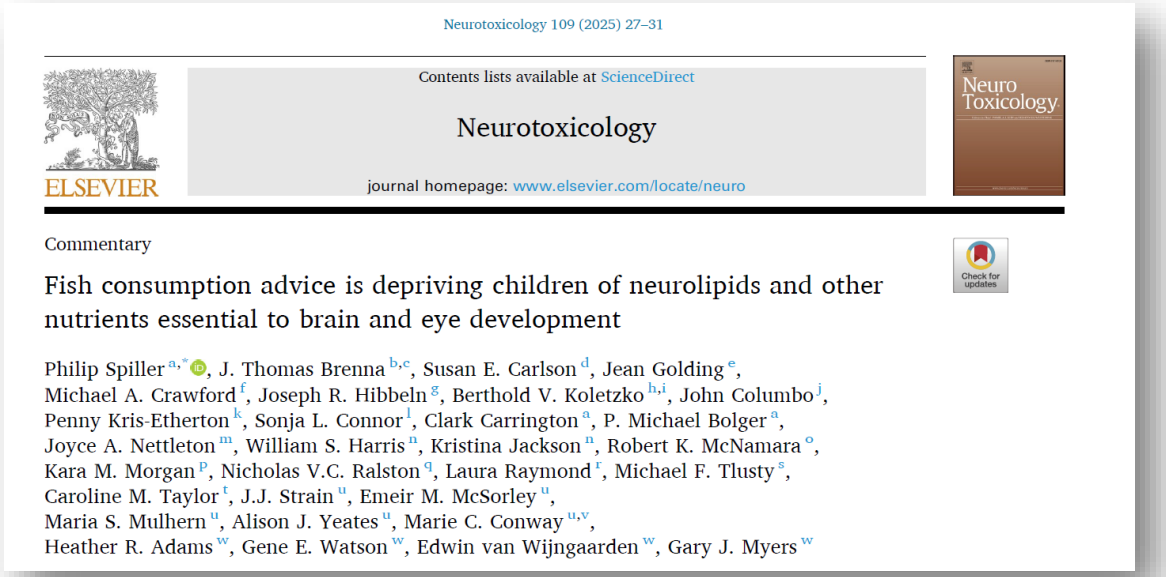
Landmark Commentary on Fish and Pregnancy



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Commentary

Fish consumption advice is depriving children of neurolipids and other nutrients essential to brain and eye development

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- Published in *Neurotoxicology* (2025)
- Authored by an international panel of 25+ leading scientists

Key Message: Current fish consumption advice may deprive children of essential nutrients for brain and eye development

Where the Warnings Came From

Minamata, Japan

Faroe Islands

Fish Builds Brains

Over 30 studies and over **300,000 mother-child pairs** now show:

- **Consistent cognitive gains** in children when mothers eat more fish during pregnancy
- **Little evidence of harm** to children's cognition from fish-related methylmercury exposure in real-world diets
- Nutrients in fish—particularly **omega-3s (DHA)**, **iodine**, **choline**, and **selenium**—are *critical* to fetal brain and eye development

"The evidence has become convincing... advisories warning about methylmercury have likely resulted in children failing to reach their full neurodevelopmental potential."

~Jean Golding (2024)

Professor Emeritus, University of Bristol, UK

Optimum intake is often **at or above 8–12 oz/week**, yet the average pregnant woman in the U.S. consumes only **~1.8 oz/week**

Messaging That Works

Overstating unproven harm undermines health:

- Categorize fish by mercury level but not by **omega-3 content**
- Imply that other foods can substitute for fish for children's neurodevelopment—**without scientific basis**

Public health messaging must:

- Highlight **absence of harm**, **positive neurodevelopmental and birth outcomes** tied to fish
- Emphasize **whole food benefits**, not just single-nutrient metrics
- Be **clearer and simpler**: e.g., eat at least 8–12 oz/week of omega-3-rich fish **for children's brain development and reduction of risk of preterm birth**

"Advice still based on precaution does not match the science."

The Consequences of Inaction

Avoidance Behavior is Common:

One-quarter of women report **rarely or never** eating fish during pregnancy

70% of fetal brain cells develop before birth—this is a **critical window**

The IQ Impact:

Gains of **an average of 7.7 IQ points** associated with optimal fish intake

Widespread underconsumption may be **depressing population-wide neurodevelopment outcomes**

Global Consensus: Seafood Supports a Healthy Pregnancy

Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Fish during pregnancy is **linked to improved infant health outcomes** — including visual acuity and cognitive development

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

World Health Organization

FAO FIAT PANIS

Higher fish intake by people of childbearing age, including during pregnancy and lactation, **shows no evidence of harm**

Let’s Feed Their Potential

Urge clinicians, communicators, and policy leaders to:

- Update the message
- Rely on scientific consensus, not old fears
- Equip pregnant people with confidence, not caution

Stay in touch

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