MERCURY | WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

1 Possible sources of exposure

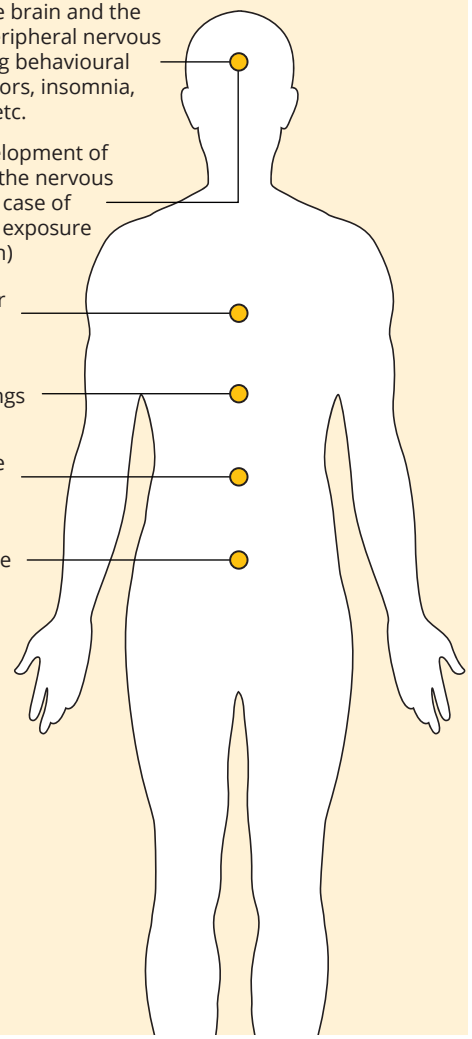
- Food (especially large predatory fish such as tuna or swordfish)
- Transplacental ingestion or via breastfeeding
- Dental amalgam fillings or damaged items containing mercury
- Occupational exposure (at fossil fuel power plants and during metal mining, non-ferrous smelting operations or cement manufacturing)
- Certain skin-lightening cosmetic products during production or long-term use

2 How can mercury enter your body?

- Via ingestion
- Via inhalation
- Via dermal absorption

3 How might mercury affect your health?

- Damage to the brain and the central and peripheral nervous system causing behavioural changes, tremors, insomnia, memory loss etc.
- Impaired development of the brain and the nervous system (in the case of transplacental exposure and in children)
- Cardiovascular disease
- Damage to lungs
- Damage to the digestive tract
- Kidney damage



4 How can you reduce your exposure to mercury?

- ✕ **Avoid** using cosmetic products containing mercury
- ✕ **Avoid** heating alloys containing mercury
- ✓ **Reduce** the frequency of consuming large predatory fish and focus on smaller species of fish to maintain a healthy diet; be particularly prudent if pregnant or breastfeeding
- ✓ **Be careful** when handling products containing mercury (fluorescent lamps, old thermometers...) and dispose of them accordingly when damaged - wrapped in plastic and bring it to the local hazardous waste management center
- ✓ **Ask** your dentist about the alternatives for amalgam dental fillings
- ✓ **Reduce** occupational exposure by using protective gear

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There are several policies in the European Union for protecting citizens from harmful exposure to mercury such as banning its use in industrial processes, products of daily use and in cosmetics. Moreover, there are legal limits for occupational exposure, mercury presence in fish and regulating mercury use in dentistry and lighting products.

For further information on mercury, please visit the '**HBM4EU Factsheet**' section.

Where can it possibly be found?

Mercury occurs naturally in the earth's crust. It can be released into the environment via volcanic activity, the weathering of rocks or as a result of human activity at coal-fired power stations or during mining. An organic form called methylmercury is commonly found in fish, mainly large predatory types such as tuna or swordfish. Mercury is also used in certain products, such as fluorescent lightbulbs, thermometers or in dental amalgam fillings.

HBM4EU science and policy for a healthy future

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 733032

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