



November 20, 2018

VIA EMAIL

Becky Lang, Editor-in-Chief
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Ms. Lang:

A report on ways we might improve brain health shouldn't uncritically include advice likely to make things worse instead. And yet that's exactly what this story does.

Specifically, the "[Bredesen protocol](#)" contains an alarmingly anti-scientific recommendation that people "cut...out high-mercury fish [like] tuna" as part of a program for improving neurological function. But this is wrong, and dangerously so, in more than one way.

First, it's not the case that tuna is "high-mercury" in any meaningful sense. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's definitive stance on mercury in seafood, a person could eat a tuna sandwich for lunch, and dinner every single day without fear or worry over mercury.

Second, and relatedly, there has *never* been a case of mercury poisoning from the normal consumption of commercial seafood reported in *any* peer reviewed medical journal. Nor does Bredesen's work appear to offer any new evidence on that score. Indeed, a survey of the materials on the "Bredesen protocol" published on the author's own web site finds just one reference to eating fish "like tuna." It is offered, purely speculatively, as one possible explanation for elevated mercury levels in study participants. But no definitive claim is made, and no proof offered either that tuna consumption is the cause of those levels, or that eating tuna causes any specific harm at all.

The story does offer a general word of caution about Bredesen's recommendations. But given that Americans already consume dangerously little seafood—an active public health crisis that dangerous advice like this are likely to exacerbate—Discover owes readers a specific warning. Readers ought to know that experts ranging from the USDA to the American Heart Association recommend eating more seafood to promote healthy brain function and prevent early cardiac death. They should also know that a government-led meta-analysis of more than 100 peer-reviewed scientific studies found that the benefits of eating a variety of seafood easily outweigh any purported risk posed by mercury. Indeed, there is emerging science on how the selenium found in seafood can actually *counteract* the harmful effects of methylmercury.

If a story offering tips for keeping your car running smoothly included the recommendation that you pour sugar in the gas tank, we'd rightly regard it as irresponsible and wrong, no matter how potentially helpful the other advice on offer. That's why, no matter how the editors feel about Bredesen's broader program, it's still critically important that Discover call out the harmful mercury myth he appears to be peddling.

We look forward to a speedy amendment of the article.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Brandon Phillips', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Brandon Phillips
Sr. Director Communications & Advocacy
National Fisheries Institute