

# Controlling histamine fish poisoning

Histamine fish poisoning (or Scombroid poisoning) is a type of food poisoning caused by elevated levels of histamine amino acids in the fish.

## How do you get histamine fish poisoning?

Naturally occurring bacteria in fish produce an enzyme which converts histidine to histamine.

Species associated with histamine fish poisoning include tuna, sardines, mackerel, swordfish and marlin.

Histamine fish poisoning occurs very quickly after eating the fish, usually within 30 minutes to a few hours.

## Symptoms

Common signs of histamine fish poisoning include:

- a peppery taste sensation
- tingling of the mouth and lips
- a skin rash
- headaches
- dizziness
- itching of the skin

In some cases nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea may also occur. Symptoms usually last four to six hours and rarely exceed one day.

It is easily treated with an antihistamine.

## How to control histamine in fish

Low levels of histamine may be present in the fish when you buy it. Unlike bacteria or viruses, histamine is not destroyed by cooking. The best way to control histamine is to ensure fish are stored and handled below 5°C.

Consumers and vendors should purchase fish from reputable suppliers who store the seafood on ice or under refrigeration so it is <5°C.

Refrigerate or freeze fish as soon as possible and keep refrigerated. When thawing frozen fish ensure that this is done in the refrigerator and not at ambient temperature.

When displaying fish for sale, have ice on the product and set refrigeration units at less than 5°C.

## About the NSW Food Authority

The NSW Food Authority is the government organisation that helps ensure NSW food is safe and correctly labelled.

It works with consumers, industry and other government organisations to minimise food poisoning by providing information about and regulating the safe production, storage, transport, promotion and preparation of food.

## More information

- visit the NSW Food Authority's website at [www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au)
- refer to the science pages at [www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/science-and-research/](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/science-and-research/)
- refer to the *Guideline for seafood retailers* at [www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/industry/industry-sector-requirements/seafood/guideline-seafood-retailers/](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/industry/industry-sector-requirements/seafood/guideline-seafood-retailers/)
- phone the helpline on 1300 552 406

## Note

This information is a general summary and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all of the provisions of the Food Standards Code and the *Food Act 2003* (NSW).