



The One That Should Have Gotten Away

The most frequently reported seafood-related illness in the world is ciguatera poisoning. In 2010, according to the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) US poison centers received 178 calls about ciguatera.

Ciguatera is caused by eating certain reef fishes such as barracudas, snapper, moray eels, parrotfish, groupers, triggerfish, and amberjack. These fish live in tropical or subtropical waters and eat up smaller fish that feed on the reefs, seaweed and coral that have the toxins.

Symptoms similar to food poisoning develop initially; nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and body aches. The symptoms then progress to tingling in hands, feet and mouth. You may experience joint pain and numbness and then the progression of the reversal of hot and cold sensations. Joint pain along with teeth that ache and tingle may last for weeks or even months if left untreated.

The AAPCC offers the following tips for safely enjoying fish at home or on vacation:

- Choose smaller fish as larger fish have a greater chance of carrying ciguatera. Cooking or freezing the fish will not destroy the toxin.
- Be sure to purchase your fish from reputable suppliers with a history of food safety.
- If symptoms develop, immediately call the poison center at 1-800-222-1222. If untreated, ciguatera can cause long lasting symptoms. Ciguatera can be treated effectively if it is diagnosed within the first 72 hours.