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Fishy tale

Giving up fish might be unthinkable for some people but that is what Rinku Samanta advocates

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All over the world, fish is one of the main sources of animal protein. According to a report from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, it comprises about 20 per cent of all animal protein consumed. In developing countries such as India, half of all animal protein consumed is fish. Certain communities have a well-established tradition of eating fish every day.

Unfortunately, the fish available these days are highly contaminated, even if they haven't been injected with formalin - a preservative that is carcinogenic - says Nandita Shah, director and founder of Sharan-India, a wellness and lifestyle organisation.

"All the pollutants and contamination in water get concentrated in fish. And this could be directly related to the increasing rate of cancer, kidney failure, diabetes, high blood pressure and other lifestyle diseases among Bengalis and other fish-loving people today," explains Shah, who is a homeopath.

What sort of contamination do the fish have? Mercury, plastic and chemicals used in industries and agriculture, enumerates Shah.

According to Dr Sofia Pineda Ochoa of the Texas Medical Centre, US, a recent sample study from around the globe showed that 84 per cent fish contain unsafe levels of mercury. Once it enters the body, mercury is very hard to eliminate and can create a host of problems, including neurological ones.

levels of mercury contamination in fish. Since then, India has signed the Minamata Convention on Mercury, an international treaty to curb mercury contamination.

Then there is plastic contamination. Every year about eight million tonnes of plastic are dumped into the seas. These break down into tiny particles which fish consume. These microplastics get deposited in their body and, eventually, in our bodies when we eat the fish.

