

Food Complaints – Round Worms in Fish



Occasionally white fish (whether bought from the fishmongers, the fish and chip shop or processed fish) can contain small worms. They are not harmful but obviously put people off eating the food.

What are they?

Parasitic round worms are frequently found in the stomach and flesh of fish. These worms can grow up to 4 cm long and can vary in colour from cream to brown. They are commonly known as Cod Worms but can also be found in other white fish such as Haddock. They are from the species *Phocanema*.

The adult worms live in the stomach of marine mammals such as the grey seal, their eggs pass into the sea and when these hatch the larvae are eaten by small crustaceans. These in turn are eaten by fish and the worms are released into the stomach of the fish. The worms bore through the stomach wall and enter the flesh of the fish. The fish is then eaten by a marine mammal which completes the life cycle of the parasite. We break into that life cycle by catching the fish.

Fish processors have systems in place to inspect the fish and remove any infested parts of the fish. No matter how carefully processors, caterers and retailers inspect fish, because of their small size, some worms will be missed and pass through to the consumer.

The presence of worms in fish sold to the consumer does not imply carelessness or bad practice. The worms are not harmful to humans once they have been killed which will happen when the fish is cooked or frozen.

What should I do?

If the fish is badly affected, then take it back to the place you bought it and ask the shop for a refund. Whilst they are not legally bound to give a refund, they normally do so in the interests of good customer relations.

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