

# CIGUATERA FISH POISONING

## WHAT IS CIGUATERA FISH POISONING?

Ciguatera is the most frequently reported seafood-related disease, and is associated with the consumption of reef fish affected with a naturally-occurring toxic substance called **ciguatoxin**.

## WHERE DO THE TOXINS COME FROM?



**Ciguatoxin** originates from a dinoflagellate (algae) species *Gambierdiscus toxicus*, which colonizes coral beds in certain tropical waters. The toxin is eaten by coral-grazing fish and is then passed up and through the food chain to larger predatory fish like barracuda.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF CIGUATERA FISH POISONING?

- ❖ nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting
- ❖ numbness and tingling around the mouth, hands, and feet
- ❖ joint and muscle pain
- ❖ reversal of temperature sensation - cold feels hot and hot feels cold

Initial symptoms can begin in as little as 1 hour after eating a ciguatoxic fish, with additional symptoms appearing later. The duration of illness generally lasts a few days, but in severe cases, some symptoms may persist for months.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO AVOID CIGUATERA FISH POISONING?

**Ciguatoxins cannot** be detected by appearance, taste, or smell, and **cannot** be removed by freezing or cooking the fish. The occurrence of ciguatoxic fish is sporadic, and not all fish of a given species or locality will be toxic. Fish species most commonly associated with Ciguatera Fish Poisoning include barracuda, groupers, snappers, jacks, mackerel, and triggerfish (see illustrations below). In general, the larger the fish, the greater the potential for Ciguatera Fish Poisoning.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT I HAVE CIGUATERA FISH POISONING?

Seek medical attention. Report the illness to your **local county health department** and the **Florida Poison Information Center (1-800-222-1222)**. You can help health professionals investigate the illness by keeping a frozen sample of the suspect fish and documenting its species and size, where it was captured/purchased, and how it was stored and prepared.

