

Guide to Answering Customers' Seafood Questions

As an expert, you know consumers are often overwhelmed by the options, or confused about how best to prepare a delicious seafood dish. Far too frequently, shoppers walk by the seafood counter or stop and stare blankly. The Seafood Nutrition Partnership is here to help! Here are some tips that answer common questions customers have when it comes to buying, preparing or serving seafood.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I EAT SEAFOOD AND WHY?

- The American Heart, Diabetes, Pediatric, Alzheimer's and Psychiatric associations — and many others — promote seafood as part of the solution to be healthier, recommending fish and shellfish at least twice a week. This recommendation, which translates to about 250 mg of omega-3s EPA and DHA per day, is based on decades of research that shows seafood at least twice a week can lead to fewer instances of chronic and preventable diseases, and even reduce the risk of death from any health-related cause by 17 percent.¹

HOW DO I KNOW IF A FISH IS FRESH?

When it comes to fresh fish, here are some tips:

- If it's the whole fish, gills should be reddish-pink and scales should be bright with a sheen.
- For fillets, the flesh of the fish should be firm and elastic, meaning it will spring back when touched.
- There should be no unpleasant odor.

For frozen fish:

- The package should be tightly wrapped, and frozen solid with little or no air space between the package and the fish. (Unless the package says flash frozen.)
- It should not be discolored. If there are points of discoloration, it may indicate freezer burn.
- There should be no odor.

When buying shellfish:

- Make sure that if they have shells, they are tightly closed, not cracked or broken.
- If you are purchasing them alive, make sure they are actually alive by tapping on the shell to make sure they close.
- The odor should be mild and sweet, not overwhelming or foul.

WHICH FISH HAVE THE MOST HEALTH BENEFITS?

- While all fish are excellent high-quality protein options, those with higher amounts of omega-3 fatty acids are packed with the most heart, brain, eye and overall health benefits. Try mackerel, trout, tuna, salmon, sardines, anchovies or pollock. Some shellfish also are rich in omega-3s such as oysters, crab and mussels.

WHAT'S A FATTY FISH?

- Fattier fish have more than 5 percent fat. They have a firmer texture, a richer flavor and deeper color, and include black cod, mackerel, salmon and trout. They are perfect for broiling, grilling, poaching, baking, or even microwaving.
- Fatty fish are one of the best sources for omega-3 fatty acids. In fact, salmon has one of the highest amounts of omega-3s per serving.

WHAT ARE THE MOST BUDGET-FRIENDLY CATCHES?

- Frozen and canned seafood can be the most budget-friendly. However, there are many seasonal and local options at the fresh counter. Ask your fishmonger and check store circulars for the best deals.

WHAT ARE THE BEST TYPES OF SEAFOOD FOR GRILLING?

- Try salmon, snapper, tuna, mahi mahi, swordfish, catfish, scallops or shrimp — they stand up to the heat and taste delicious when grilled.
- Use foil or a plank to cook delicate fish such as cod, tilapia and flounder.



HOW DO I PREPARE FISH WITHOUT ANY ADDITIONAL FAT OR FRYING?

- For lean, mild-flavored fish with tender flesh, such as sea bass, cod, flounder, grouper, haddock, halibut, pollock or monkfish, you can steam, poach or even microwave without adding fat.
- For medium-fat fish, such as catfish, mullet or swordfish, any cooking method will do.
- For fattier fish with a firmer texture, richer flavor, and deeper color — such as salmon, mackerel or trout — try broiling, grilling, poaching, baking or microwaving.

IF A RECIPE CALLS FOR A WHITE FISH, WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

- White fish is generally a mild-flavored fish, so if your recipe calls for it, look for cod, bass, flounder, grouper, haddock, snapper or tilapia. These are great for pan-frying, pan-searing, using in soups and chowders, and baking.

SHOULD YOU EAT SEAFOOD WHILE PREGNANT?

- The FDA and EPA agree seafood consumption is especially important for pregnant or nursing women because eating fish regularly helps with the growth and development of children's brains and even helps boost IQ.² Babies from moms who ate seafood twice a week have a higher IQ by an average of 5.8 points.³ Studies have shown women who do not eat seafood during pregnancy are twice as likely to experience depression.⁴

SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT MERCURY IN FISH?

- For men and women not trying to get pregnant, the recommendation is to eat a variety of seafood each week to reap the range of nutrients in different types of fish, and there are no specific species you need to avoid.
- The FDA and EPA released advice urging pregnant women, breastfeeding moms, and young children to consume more fish and seafood, including all of the most popular seafood in the U.S. from salmon to canned tuna. The guidance listed seven fish to avoid during pregnancy due to higher mercury: shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish, bigeye tuna (does not include canned tuna), marlin and orange roughy.²

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "SUSTAINABLE"?

- Sustainable means that the seafood has been caught or farmed with minimal impact to the environment.

² FDA/EPA (2017). Eating Fish: What Pregnant Women and Parents Should Know. Available at <https://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm393070.htm>. Updated 11/29/2017.

³ FAO/WHO (2011). Report of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on the Risks and Benefits of Fish Consumption. Rome, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; Geneva, World Health Organization, 50 pp.

⁴ Hibbeln JR, et al. Maternal seafood consumption in pregnancy and neurodevelopmental outcomes in childhood (ALSPAC study): an observational cohort study. *Lancet*. 2007;369(9561):578-85.

⁵ NOAA. What is aquaculture? Available at <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/aquaculture.html>. Updated 10/10/2017.

How to safely store seafood at home

FRESH FISH

- If your commute home is over an hour, take your fish home in a cooler or use portable insulated bags available at the store.
- All fresh seafood should be kept in your refrigerator or on ice at 32°F. It should feel cold to the touch, so store it in the coldest part of your refrigerator.
- Wrap fish or fillets in moisture-proof paper or plastic wrap.
- If it's not prepacked, you should wash it under cold running water and pat dry with a paper towel.
- Use fresh or defrosted fish within one to two days.
- Do not refreeze previously frozen fish.

FROZEN FISH

- Store frozen fish in your freezer (0°F).
- You can store commercially frozen fish for up to six months.
- Thaw it in the refrigerator (a 1 lb. package takes about 24 hours).
- You can also thaw it under cold, running water or place it in a container with cold water, refreshing water frequently (fillets take 15-30 minutes depending on thickness).

IS FARMED FISH SAFE TO EAT?

- Both farmed and wild seafood are safe to eat. According to NOAA, farming fish, shellfish and even seaweed helps produce food while restoring habitats, replenishing wild stocks, and rebuilding populations of threatened and endangered species.⁵ When it comes to the environment, both farmed and wild fish and shellfish can be harvested responsibly, or not, so it is best to find out the sustainability policy of your grocer or look for a trusted certification on the package.

¹ Mozaffarian D, Rimm EB. Fish intake, contaminants, and human health: evaluating the risks and the benefits. *JAMA*. 2006;296:1885-99.