

SEAFOOD IN THE NEWS

Nutrition News You Can Use



Learn about the health benefits of fish and choosing sustainable seafood



Our dietitians receive hundreds of questions each year about a wide variety of nutrition topics. Their timely and trustworthy insights and ideas can help you and your family live healthier lives.

Seafood's popularity

America loves seafood. The average American eats over 16 pounds of fish and shellfish every year. U.S. seafood consumption is up more than 30% since 1980. Seafood's popularity has surged for a number of reasons. Seafood is widely available, easy to prepare, versatile, and to the joy of seafood lovers everywhere, good for you. The health benefits of seafood make it an even more attractive part of our diets.

Americans are experiencing more ways to prepare and enjoy seafood. Grilled, baked or broiled — in entrees, salads, sandwiches, or even raw in sushi — fish has found its way onto our everyday menus in more ways than ever. Because it is so popular, it's important to understand the facts about seafood's health benefits, the potential risks of eating too much fish, and how we can help to preserve our oceans and fisheries for future generations.

Why is fish so good for you?

Fish is a good source of protein. Most types of fish are also relatively low in saturated fat. For this reason, eating seafood is a positive step because it can help to decrease the amount of 'bad fats' in your diet. Many types of seafood also contain 'good fats' known as Omega-3's. Omega-3's are a type of fat that can actually lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease. Omega-3's can be found in fish, nuts and vegetable oils and are increasingly recognized as important to human health. Two high quality types of Omega-3's (called DHA and EPA) can only be found in fish. This is one of the reasons why it's important for most people to include fish as part of a healthy diet.

Do scientific studies confirm seafood's health benefits?

For some time public health studies have shown measurable health benefits from fish consumption. Recently these findings were reinforced by the Harvard School of Public Health. According to the Harvard study eating a few servings of fatty fish a week, the kind that contain the highest levels of Omega-3's, can reduce the risk of death from heart disease by more than 30%. This is consistent with the 2010 U.S. Dietary Guidelines and the American Heart Association which both recommend that Americans consume two servings of seafood each week as part of a balanced diet (a serving is 3 ounces).

The Harvard study showed that eating only two servings of seafood a week delivers most of the benefit. Eating more didn't dramatically enhance the health impact. So for the general population, even a few servings of fish each week can make a real positive difference to your health.

Preserving our oceans for future generations

The rising popularity of seafood and the very positive health news does have a downside — our oceans are being overfished. Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch® Program reports that nearly 75% of the world's fisheries are either 'fully-fished' or 'overfished.' Many fish species are already overfished to the point of collapse. As a result, choosing "sustainable seafood" whenever possible is critical to preserving our seafood supply and oceans for future generations.

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Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that's right for you.

"Sustainable seafood" comes from fish and shellfish species that are not at risk. That means sustainable seafood is fished in a way that does not compromise a species long term survival. Also, fisheries (or fish 'farms') that provide sustainable seafood make sure that they do not damage the environment while catching (or farming) the fish for our tables. Monterey Bay Seafood Watch Program makes choosing sustainable seafood easier. Monterey Bay Aquarium publishes a pocket sized Seafood Watch list of recommended Best Choices, Good Alternatives, or Seafood items to avoid. Updated versions of the Seafood Watch list and more information about seafood sustainability are available at www.seafoodwatch.org

Are there important seafood health guidelines?

First, remember that how fish is prepared is important. The positive health benefits of eating seafood can be offset if fish is deep fried in oil with trans fats or covered in cream or butter sauces. Make sure the restaurants you visit use zero trans fat frying oil and try to select seafood that is broiled, steamed, baked or grilled without unhealthy sauces.

It's also important to eat a variety of fish and shellfish and to avoid over-consumption. Some seafood does contain elevated levels of mercury and other contaminants absorbed from ocean ecosystems where fisheries are located. Eating too much seafood can be a risk because it can

cause a concentration of these chemicals in the body. Experts recommend that everyone avoid over-consumption and also vary the types of fish eaten as a way to avoid potential issues associated with any one fish species.

Current federal guidelines advise women who are pregnant or who plan to become pregnant, nursing mothers, and children under 12 years old to avoid fish that may contain high mercury levels such as shark, swordfish, tilefish, albacore tuna and king mackerel.

Of course people who are at a greater risk for food borne illness should not eat raw or undercooked seafood (this includes pregnant women, young children, older adults and people with compromised immune systems. If you are unsure of your risk ask your health provider). Foods made with raw or undercooked fish or shellfish are more likely to contain parasites or bacteria than cooked seafood.

Seafood in a healthy diet

The health benefits of seafood are exciting. With so many ways to enjoy fish remember to include it in your diet each week. Make sure that you prepare seafood using healthy cooking techniques. Vary the fish you consume and look for sustainable seafood to help preserve our oceans and fisheries for future generations.