



## ASK THE DIETITIAN

### Seafood and Your Health

**Q. I heard that fish is good for you because of Omega-3's, what are they and why are they good for health?**

A. Fish is a healthy choice because it is a good source of protein and most are low in saturated fat. Fish also provides Omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3's are essential in the diet because the body cannot make them and we have to get omega 3-s from foods like fish, nuts, and vegetable oils. Omega-3 fatty acids include EPA and DHA which have been shown to provide health benefits such as lowering cholesterol and reducing risk for heart disease. You can gain the benefits of Omega-3's by enjoying up to 12 ounces of low-mercury fish per week such as salmon, light tuna, herring, and sardines as well as including other sources in their diet such as soybean oil, flaxseed and walnuts.

**Q. Should I avoid seafood if I'm pregnant?**

A. Seafood is a good source of protein, low in saturated fat, and provides Omega-3 fatty acids. Seafood can be a healthy part of your diet when pregnant; however, the FDA recommends that pregnant women should avoid raw fish as well as shark, swordfish, king mackerel, or tilefish. The FDA also recommends that pregnant women limit seafood to about 12 ounces per week. Do include other fish varieties that contain Omega-3's since studies suggest that the Omega-3 DHA is important for a healthy pregnancy and a healthy child. If you're not fond of fish include other sources of Omega 3's such as soybean and canola oil, flaxseed, and walnuts. Talk to your doctor and a registered dietitian to make sure that you're making the best choices for you and your baby.

**Q. I have been eating more seafood lately, should I be worried about mercury and other contaminants that are found in seafood?**

A. Mercury and other contaminants vary in seafood. Levels of contaminants vary due to size, location, diet, and age of the fish. Everyone should be aware and take care to minimize exposure to the toxins found in seafood. Check local advisories to make sure that fish caught for locally are safe, vary the types of fish you eat and avoid over consumption. To help prevent food borne illness, it's important to use proper cooking and storage techniques. In addition the FDA/EPA has provided more specific guidance for children, pregnant women and women of child bearing age; avoid fish that are more likely to be contaminated like shark, swordfish, king mackerel and tilefish and eat up to 12 ounces of fish and shellfish per week which is approximately 2 meals per week. Also keep in mind that persons at greater risk for food borne illness such as pregnant women, young children, older adults and persons with compromised immune systems should avoid eating raw or undercooked fish.

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



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#### **Q. What is “sustainable seafood?”**

A. Sustainable seafood comes from fish or shellfish species that are caught or farmed in ways that do not damage our environment and will not contribute to the collapse of that fish population. Since many fish populations are being over fished to the point of collapse it is important to choose sustainable seafood whenever possible. For more information go to [www.seafoodwatch.org](http://www.seafoodwatch.org).

#### **Q. How can I purchase the best seafood when shopping?**

A. First, check out the surrounding area where the fish is sold. Make sure it is clean and that the fish is being properly stored on ice or refrigerated. Make sure the fish smells mild and not too “fishy”. Next check the appearance of the fish. It should be shiny, have bright gills, and clear eyes. It should be firm to the touch and not show any darkening, discoloration, or dry edges. It is important to make sure you look for the freshest fish, because fish that has been sitting around too long can cause illness. If the shells are cracked or open do not select them. When buying frozen seafood avoid any whose package or bag is torn or open. Also make sure that there are no ice crystals forming on the fish.

#### **Q. What is the safest way to cook seafood?**

A. When cooking seafood you should make sure you keep it away from ready-to-eat foods to avoid cross-contamination. Seafood should be cooked to an internal temperature of 145 degrees; however there are other ways to tell if it is cooked thoroughly. Fish, shrimp, and scallops turn white or opaque when done. Shellfish like clams, mussels, and oysters open up when they are done. Refrigerate left-over seafood immediately and discard if not eaten within 2 days. To avoid your risk for food borne illness, avoid eating raw or undercooked seafood.

#### **Q. Sushi has become more popular in the U.S. over the last decade. What should I know about eating sushi?**

A. Millions of people enjoy the tasty Japanese food specialty sushi, a combination of fish, vegetables and rice wrapped in seaweed then cut into bite-sized morsels. The seafood in sushi can be cooked or raw. Many prefer sushi that includes cooked seafood like crab in California rolls. Others prefer vegetarian sushi rolls that usually include raw vegetables and sometimes tofu. The largest selection of sushi is from a wide variety of raw fish such as tuna and salmon. While raw sushi is widely enjoyed, the safest way to eat seafood is fully cooked. People who are in high-risk groups such as women who are pregnant, children, or people with compromised immune systems should avoid eating raw fish.

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