

Fresh and Frozen Seafood: Selecting and Serving it Safely

Video Transcript

This message is brought to you by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Nothing like a long day of fishing to take your mind off of things. Fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthful diet. They contain high quality protein and other essential nutrients. Just make sure the seafood you eat is fresh and limit the fried.

With most foods, freshness has a direct bearing on the nutritional value you get. With seafood, it affects not only taste and nutrition, but also safety.

Seafood that hasn't been kept at proper temperatures can do more than just taste bad – it can make you sick. Make sure this doesn't happen to you. Keep these tips in mind when buying, storing or cooking seafood.

With fish, make sure it's displayed on a thick bed of ice that's not melting, preferably in a case with a cover. And although counter-intuitive, it should smell fresh and mild – not fishy or sour. The eyes should be clear and bulge a bit. Look for bright red gills, and firm, shiny flesh that springs back when pressed.

A fillet should not be dark or dry around the edges or have any green or yellowish discoloration. It also shouldn't be dry or mushy – that means it's probably old and not safe to eat.

Shellfish should be live. Try the tap test – live clams, oysters and mussels will close when you tap the shell. Discard ones that don't and stay away from cracked or broken shells.

Lobsters and crabs should have leg movement. They spoil quickly after death, so only buy those you know are alive.

With frozen seafood, don't buy open, torn or crushed packages. Avoid packages above the "frost line" and check for signs of frost or ice crystals, which can indicate the package is old or has been thawed and refrozen.

At home, keep your seafood in the refrigerator if you'll be using it within two days. Otherwise, wrap it tightly and store it in the freezer. When ready to prepare, thaw it in the refrigerator overnight or under cold water. For microwave, use the defrost setting and stop the cycle while the fish is still icy but pliable.

Most seafood should be cooked to an internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit. For fish, the flesh should be opaque and separate easily. Scallops turn milky white or opaque and firm, while shrimp and lobster flesh becomes pearly-opaque.

Cook mussels, clams and oysters until the shells open, which means they're done. Throw out the ones that don't open.

When serving, never leave seafood out for more than two hours – or for more than one if the outside temperature is above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Bacteria that cause illness grow quickly at temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit.

If you're catching your dinner, you should store your caught fillets in an ice-packed cooler stored in the shade. The same is true for picnics. Carry seafood in a clean cooler packed with ice. Keep it in the shade with the lid closed as much as possible.

Keeping these tips in mind will help you enjoy the fine taste and good nutrition that seafood has to offer.

