

NEW JERSEY SEA GRANT MARINE ADVISORY SERVICE

MARINE CUISINE

fish as food series no. 9

Seafood... Safe food

CIRCULATING COPY

Handy Seafood Safety Tips



No doubt about it, Americans are hooked on seafood. Recent figures show that the American public consumed nearly 4 billion pounds of fish and shellfish and spent more than \$39 billion on seafood products in a single year! As seafood continues to catch on with consumers, they want assurances it's as safe as, or safer to eat, than other foods.

Like fruits, vegetables, and dairy products, fish and shellfish are subject to the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, administered by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA inspects seafood plants to make sure they comply with sanitation and processing regulations, monitors seafood products to make sure they conform to regulations governing pesticides and other contaminants, and extensively surveys imported seafood products at their ports of entry.

The FDA Office of Seafood has also announced plans to implement a new, mandatory, fish inspection program based on the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system, in 1996. Under HACCP (pronounced "hassip"), seafood is checked at critical points in its journey from sea to consumer to help monitor and control specific processing steps, and further insure quality and safety.

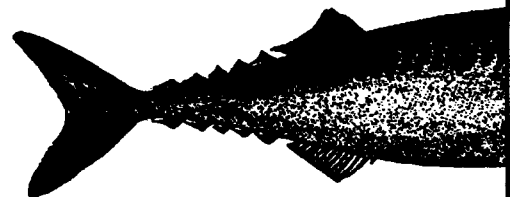
Federal and state agencies, aquaculturists, scientists, commercial fishermen, processors, retailers, and restaurants all play an important role in providing and carrying out handling, processing, and inspection procedures to provide consumers with the safest seafood possible. But one of the most important phases of seafood safety falls to the consumer, who must follow through with proper handling techniques, from purchase to preparation.

The buying, storing, and preparation tips included in this edition of Marine Cuisine are designed to provide consumers with simple, useful information to help them become savvy about seafood safety.



WHAT'S IN STORE?

Always buy seafood from reputable dealers and markets. Notice the store's display. All fresh seafood should be stored as near to 32° F as possible, which is maintained by refrigeration and/or ice. Fresh seafood should feel cold to the touch, not cool. Use your eyes, hands, and nose when selecting fresh fish or shellfish. And remember seafood is highly perishable. If you're buying seafood at the market, make it one of your last purchases.



FROM STORE TO STORAGE

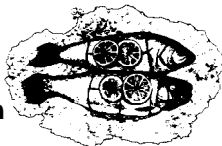
Maintain refrigerator temperature at 32°F to 40°F and the freezer at 0° or below. Check the temperature periodically. Avoid cross-contamination in your refrigerator, too. Make sure juices from raw seafood don't drip onto food that will not be cooked! When your seafood purchase arrives home, store it in the coldest part of your refrigerator, which is usually under the freezer or in the "meat keeper" drawer. In general use fish quickly, within one or two days.

Fresh Fish

Fish bruises easily, so lift a whole fish with both hands and avoid holding it by the tail.

Seal fillets or steaks in plastic bags or containers then cover them with ice in trays or pans.

Pack dressed fish on ice in the refrigerator.



Fish that's not prepackaged should be washed under cold, running water and patted dry with a paper towel.

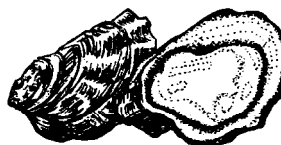
Wrap fish in moisture-proof paper or plastic wrap, and place in air-tight bag or container until ready for cooking.

Fresh Shellfish

Store live shellfish in a shallow dish covered with damp towels or moistened paper towels.

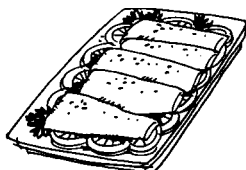
Never put live shellfish in water or an airtight container where they could suffocate and die.

Some shellfish may open during storage. Give them a tap. They'll close if alive. If not, discard.



Frozen Food

Immediately store commercially wrapped frozen seafood in the coldest part of your freezer, at a temperature as close to -20° F as possible.



Avoid prolonged storage. Commercially frozen seafood can be stored in the freezer for up to six months.

Leftovers

Refrigerate leftovers immediately in shallow, covered containers or moisture-proof packages. Use within 1-2 days. Frozen leftovers should be dated. Frozen or not, if in doubt, throw it out!

Before serving, cover and reheat leftovers to 160° F. Reheat soups, sauces and other "wet" foods to a rolling boil.

FROM STORAGE TO STOMACH

Rinse seafood in cold water to remove any surface bacteria.

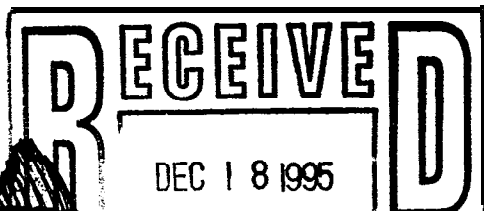
Always marinate seafood in the refrigerator, never on a countertop at room temperature.

Don't leave seafood, raw or cooked, out of the refrigerator for over two hours, including preparation time and time on the table.



Avoid cross-contamination! Never put cooked seafood on the same plate used for raw seafood. The cooked food could pick up harmful microorganisms left on the plate from raw seafood.

Use separate, clean utensils and wash hands frequently.



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