

Consumer Tips For Purchasing High Quality Seafood

Fresh seafood, like many other foods, are more abundant during certain seasons of the year. Your seafood dealer can tell you about seasonal offerings. Your dealer can also indicate the most economical seafood varieties. Always purchase seafood from a dealer that maintains high quality.

Base your seafood purchases on quality. Frozen seafood can be superior in quality to fresh products. Many fish and shellfish are "flash frozen" within hours of harvest. It might take several days for the same seafood to make it to your seafood dealer as "fresh."

When you purchase seafood, look for the following characteristics of high quality.

Fresh Whole Fish

Appearance is bright and shiny, and most of the scales are intact and adhere tightly to the skin. Each species has characteristic markings and colors which fade and become less pronounced as the fish loses freshness.

Eyes are bright, clear, full, and often protrude. As quality goes down, the eyes often turn pink and become cloudy and sunken. This does not always apply to small-eyed fish such as salmon.

Gills are red and free from slime. The color fades with time to light pink, then gray, and finally greenish or dull brown.

Odor is fresh and mild. A fish just out of the water has practically no "fish" odor. The fishy odor develops with time, but should not be strong or objectionable.

Flesh is firm, elastic, and not separating from the bones.

Fresh Fillets and Steaks

Odor is fresh and mild. Flesh is moist, firm, elastic, and has a fresh-cut appearance without traces of browning or drying around the edges.

Pre-packaged steaks and fillets are in tightly wrapped packages. There is little or no air space between the fish and the wrapping material, and no liquid in the package.

Frozen Seafood

Flesh is solid, and there is no discoloration or drying (freezer burn) on the surface.

Odor is not evident or is fresh and mild.

Wrapping material is moisture and vapor proof, fits closely around the product, and is undamaged.

Packaging materials do not contain ice crystals, or have waterstains or other indications that the product had thawed at any point.

Packaged breaded and unbreaded products have a clean and uniform appearance. Individual pieces separate easily. Breading is intact.

Packaged frozen seafood may have an expiration date stamped on the label. Use the seafood before the expiration date.

Shrimp

Fresh shrimp have a mild odor and firm textured meat. The shell or meat is not slippery, and there are no odor. Black spots or patches on the shell or meat.

The shell of raw shrimp may be grayish green, pinkish tan, or light pink. When cooked, the shell turns red and the meat takes on a similar reddish tint.

Cooked shrimp have red shells, firm meat, and a mild

Crabs, Lobsters and Crayfish

Live crabs, lobsters, spiny lobsters, and crayfish move their legs. The "tail" of a live lobster curls under the body and does not hang down when you pick it up.

Frozen spiny or rock lobster tails have clear white meat, no odor, and are hard-frozen.

Cooked crabs, lobsters, and crayfish have bright orange to red shells and are free of any disagreeable odor.

Smoked Fish

Smoked fish are bright and glossy. There is no dried blood or mold on the product.

Simulated Seafood Products

Simulated crab meat, lobster meat, shrimp, scallops and other seafood products made from surimi have a fresh and mild odor.

Simulated seafood products are moist, and have a fresh appearance without traces of browning or discoloration.

Clams, Oysters and Mussels

Purchase raw shellfish carefully. Buy raw clams, oysters and mussels only from reputable markets. If in doubt, ask the seafood market personnel to show you the certified shipper's tag that accompanies "shell on" products or check the shipper number on shucked oyster containers.

Clams, oysters and mussels in the shell are alive, and the shells close tightly when tapped. Gaping shells indicate that the shellfish are dead and not edible.

Shucked oysters are plump, and have a mild odor, a natural creamy color, and clear liquid or nectar.

Scallops

Fresh scallops have a sweetish odor and are free of excess liquid when packaged. The meat of the large sea scallop is white, orange or pink. Smaller bay and calico scallops are white, light tan, or pinkish.

Cooked Ready-To-Eat Seafood

Cooked ready-to-eat seafood include cooked crabmeat, cooked shrimp, smoked fish, and simulated seafood products. Contamination with illness causing bacteria can make cooked seafood unsafe.

Live and raw seafood may naturally carry illness causing bacteria. These bacteria are not a problem if you cook seafood thoroughly. The bacteria can be a problem if they transfer to cooked ready-to-eat seafood.

The transfer of illness causing bacteria to cooked seafood can occur when store personnel use poor handling techniques. For example, contamination can occur when:

1. Live or raw seafood contact cooked seafood
2. Live or raw seafood pass over and drip onto cooked seafood.
3. The person you buy seafood from uses the same utensils for raw and cooked seafood.
4. The person you buy seafood from uses bare hands to pick up cooked seafood.

Do not purchase cooked seafood if you observe poor seafood handling techniques.

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