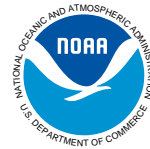


SEAFOOD & HUMAN HEALTH



NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

The connection between seafood and health is undeniable, yet information available to consumers is confusing at best and often conflicting. The Food and Drug Administration is the primary government agency that manages food safety and food health issues. However, as part of the Department of Commerce, NOAA and NOAA's Fisheries Service have an obligation to help make information about seafood products more accessible to the general public. Consumers want to know whether fish and other seafood is healthy and safe to eat and feed to their families.

NOAA's goal is to provide balanced information that puts the benefits and risks of seafood consumption into perspective to help consumers make educated decisions about their diet.

The latest research shows that seafood plays an important role in a healthy diet, with compelling evidence demonstrating the importance of Omega-3 fatty acids for cardiovascular health. The world's top researchers have found that seafood can also help fight illnesses such as cancer, inflammatory diseases, and Alzheimer's. Studies have linked seafood consumption with lower heart rates, lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure, and lower body weight. Eating just a small amount of seafood that is high in Omega-3 fatty acids (such as shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish) each day can provide tremendous health benefits.

There are health benefits for pregnant and nursing women as well, although they should avoid the four species of



Seafood inspectors

fish that are highest in mercury. Seafood contains important nutrients that promote brain development and may lessen the effects of dyslexia, autism, hyperactivity and attention-deficit disorder in children. Some of these exciting results, including the benefit of naturally occurring selenium, were presented at a recent international conference on seafood and health in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the governments of Canada, Norway, Iceland, and the United States.

Recognizing that the available science can be confusing to consumers, NOAA commissioned the National Academy of Sciences to undertake a broad study of the risks and benefits of seafood, giving particular attention to vulnerable subpopulations, such as women who are pregnant or nursing. A world-class panel of scientists examined all existing scientific literature and found that seafood makes a positive contribution to a healthful diet. A compatible study conducted by Harvard cardiologists concluded that the benefits of eating seafood far outweigh perceived risks, and just two six-ounce seafood meals per week can cut the risk of coronary death by 36 percent.

Seafood Consumption Recommendations

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the American Heart Association recommend that people consume two seafood meals per week for optimal health.
- The National Academy study concludes that, for people who eat more than two seafood meals per week, the key to minimizing exposure to potential trace elements is to eat a variety of seafood products; do not eat the same species every day.
- The National Academy study aligned with federal guidelines on seafood consumption for vulnerable subpopulations: women who are pregnant, nursing, or who may become pregnant and children under 12 should eat seafood, but avoid shark, swordfish, tilefish, and king mackerel. They can eat up to six ounces of white canned tuna with no concern of health risk from mercury exposure.

To help simplify consumer messages and provide science-based information, NOAA has launched a new Web-based consumer tool called FishWatch. This Web site features health and environment information about some of the nation's top consumed seafood items and also includes tips for safe selection, handling and preparation of seafood to minimize food-borne illness <http://www.fishwatch.noaa.gov>

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Seafood is an important part of a healthful diet. Seafood contains high-quality protein and other essential nutrients, is often low in saturated fat, and contains omega-3 fatty acids. In fact, a well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fish and shellfish can contribute to heart health and children's growth and development. But, as with any type of food, it's important to handle seafood properly in order to reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Follow basic food safety tips for buying, preparing, and storing fish and shellfish, and you and your family can safely enjoy the fine taste and good nutrition of seafood. 🐟