What a Catch
How to choose the most sustainable seafood

BY ALLISON YOUNG
RECIPIES DEVELOPED BY REBECCA CARO

Lobster and tuna and barramundi—oh my! Standing in front of the fish counter isn’t as easy as it used to be. Tuna or tilapia, salmon or sardines, farmed or wild, fresh or frozen—the choices are enough to make my head swim … I mean spin. Plus, I’m nursing a newborn, and it just seems easier to skip seafood altogether instead of making the wrong choice.

RECIPES
• Seared Scallops With Udon Noodles, page 46
• Blackened Striped Bass With Braised Garlic Greens, page 47
• Wild Smoked Salmon Dip, page 47
• Light Shrimp Salad, page 47
But I can’t, because I know both my baby and I can benefit from the heart-healthy, brain-boosting omega-3s found in fish, not to mention the good-for-you nutrients like vitamin D, selenium, zinc, and protein. I want my son to grow up in a world that still has wild seafood, a stock some experts say could be depleted by 2048. That’s why it’s more important than ever to pick sustainable seafood from responsible fisheries that limit bycatch (unintentional catches that are often unwanted and go unused) and don’t damage the surrounding environment. But without an eco-expert at my beck and call, how do I know what types of fish are best for my family?

Rather than get frustrated, I decided to get educated and go to the experts—scientists, nutritionists, and chefs—in order to separate fish fact from fiction.

**MYTH #1: The downsides of mercury outweigh the benefits of fish.**
**TRUTH: The health boost you get from omega-3s trumps possible toxins.**

If fear of mercury is stopping you from eating seafood, rest assured that the heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids found in fish, especially cold-water, oily species like salmon and sardines, outweigh the risks. Omega-3s do more than tune up your ticker; they reduce inflammation in the body, fight depression, help burn fat, improve cognitive function, and repair dry skin, says Esther Blum, RD, a holistic nutritionist and author of Secrets of Gorgeous (Chronicle Books, 2008). Studies also show that the essential fatty acids in fish, notably DHA, help nourish a baby’s developing brain and may decrease the risk of delivering a preterm, low birth-weight baby.

You can get too much mercury, but most experts agree you’d have to eat high-mercury varieties like swordfish, shark, mackerel, tilefish, and tuna at least once a week to experience symptoms, which range from tingling in the hands and feet to memory loss and neurological dysfunction, says Steven Masley, MD, clinical assistant professor at the University of South Florida.

The bottom line? Don’t ditch fish if you’re pregnant or worried about mercury, but do skip mercury heavyweights in favor of two 12-ounce servings a week of flounder, herring, haddock, shrimp, catfish, farm-raised trout, sardines, or wild Pacific salmon. And remember: Variety is the spice of life when it comes to seafood. “Even if you don’t know the specific contaminant level in the fish that you buy, you’re much more likely to minimize your risk of toxin and mercury exposure if you buy several different species instead of just one,” says Tim Fitzgerald, a marine scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund.

**MYTH #2: Fisheries—not consumers—are depleting the fish supply.**
**TRUTH: The seafood you eat (and avoid) can make a difference.**

Can just one person—or one fish choice—impact the sustainability of our fish supply? “Absolutely,” says Fitzgerald. “The crisis in the oceans right now in terms of overfishing and collapsing fish populations is as much a product of consumer demand as it is the regulations that govern fisheries.”

So what’s a concerned consumer to do? The first step is to download a wallet-sized fish-advisory card from the Environmental Defense Fund (oceansalive.org) so you’ll know which farmed and wild fish to pick—and which to skip—for your health and the planet’s. And when you go out to eat, read the menu (or ask the wait-staff) to find out how the restaurant purchases its fish. “Look at the way the

---

**Put Your Best Fish Forward**

Carrie Brownstein, seafood quality standards coordinator at Whole Foods Market, dishes on the do’s and don’ts of selecting and storing fresh fish.

**WHEN CHOOSING FISH:**

**DO** look for firm, shiny flesh that bounces back when touched. And if the head is still on, the fish’s eyes should be clear and bulge a little.

**DO** sniff the fish; it should smell like a fresh ocean breeze—not “fishy.”

**DO** look for shiny scales and skin that clings tightly to the flesh when buying whole fish; steaks and fillets should be moist with no discoloration.

**WHEN STORING FISH:**

**DON’T** buy it and then let it sit in your fridge all week. As a general rule, refrigerated seafood should be used within two days. Live seafood, such as crabs and lobsters, should be cooked the same day.

**DON’T** marinate seafood on the counter at room temperature; let it marinate in the fridge and discard the marinade after use, as it may contain food-borne bacteria.

**DON’T** use a wooden cutting board when slicing raw fish. Instead, choose a plastic one, which is less likely to harbor illness-inducing bacteria.
restaurant procures a lot of its other food,” says Kristofor Lofgren, owner of Bamboo Sushi in Portland, Oregon, the first Marine Stewardship Council–certified independent restaurant in the US. “If they support local, organic farms, generally speaking they’re going to support better-quality fish practices.”

**MYTH #3:** All farmed fish are bad for the environment.
**TRUTH:** Not all farmed fish are environmental evils.

Many types of seafood are actually farmed in a responsible way, says Fitzgerald; it’s farmed salmon that gives aquaculture a bad name. Often raised in crowded ocean cages and treated with antibiotics and pesticides to control parasites and disease, farmed salmon has PCB levels up to 10 times higher than wild salmon, according to some studies. These known carcinogens are concentrated in the fish-meal feed.

“Farmed salmon requires the use of lots of wild fish that fisheries catch and grind up to put into the feed,” says Fitzgerald, who notes that many fisheries use 3 to 6 pounds of wild fish for 1 pound of farmed salmon. In fact, 37 percent of all seafood is ground up into feed, up from 7.7 percent in 1948, according to the Fisheries Centre at the University of British Columbia.

Myth #4: There’s nothing you can do to cut down on mercury in fish.
Truth: Choosing the right fish and cooking it the right way can lighten the toxic load.

Generally speaking, the smaller the fish, the better. “Larger fish such as king mackerel, shark, swordfish, tilefish, and tuna tend to accumulate a higher concentration of mercury because of their consumption of organisms high on the food chain,” says Masley. Smaller species, like salmon and haddock, don’t
healing foods

live as long and eat fish that are lower on the food chain, so they have less time to accumulate toxins that build up in the fatty tissue.

When it comes to cooking fish, you can further cut contaminants by trimming skin and fatty tissue. “You don’t want the fish to cook in its own fat because most toxins and mercury are in the fat,” says Alex Jamieson, a certified holistic health counselor and personal chef, who says to skip frying in favor of steaming, broiling, or poaching.

**MYTH #5: Labels tell you all you need to know about the catch.**

**TRUTH: Fish labels can be misleading or missing altogether.**

Don’t expect the label on your fish package—if there is one—to indicate how eco-friendly the catch is. As of 2005, the USDA made seafood COOL, meaning it mandated “country-of-origin labeling” so customers would know where their seafood came from and whether it was farm raised or wild caught. But the ruling doesn’t go far enough. The COOL label mandate, according to Fitzgerald, “only applies to supermarkets or large chain stores.”

Another label that can cause confusion is “organic.” Because there’s no such thing as USDA-certified organic seafood, if you do see “organic” seafood, it’s likely from Europe, where standards can vary greatly.

Not sure how to sort through the label lingo? Don’t try, says Rick Moonen, chef and owner of RM Seafood in Las Vegas. “Buying from a source or a store you trust is the way to go,” he says. One label you can trust and that appears on wild-caught varieties more often these days is the Marine Stewardship Council’s seal, a blue oval label that tells you you’re buying from an environmentally responsible fishery.

---

**For a wallet-size list**

of the top 10 eco-friendly fish, check out naturalsolutionsmag.com/go/webexclusives.
Seared Scallops With Udon Noodles

SERVES 4

FOR THE SCALLOPS
2 tablespoons flour
2 tablespoons panko
(Japanese bread crumbs)
½ teaspoon salt
8 to 16 scallops (2 to 4 per person)
1 tablespoon olive oil

FOR THE NOODLES
1 package udon noodles
2 tablespoons sesame oil
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 scallions, thinly sliced
1 teaspoon fresh grated ginger
¼ cup tamari or shoyu (soy sauce)
Black sesame seeds and fresh cilantro for garnish (optional)

FOR THE SCALLOPS
1. Combine the first three ingredients in a large Ziploc bag, and shake thoroughly.
2. Add scallops, seal the bag, and shake to coat.
3. Heat oil in a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add scallops, cook 3 minutes on each side, or until done. Remove from heat.

FOR THE NOODLES
1. Cook udon noodles according to package directions; drain.
2. To prepare dressing, combine sesame oil, garlic, scallions, ginger, and shoyu sauce; mix well.
3. Place noodles in a medium-sized glass or non-reactive stainless dish; add dressing and mix well to coat noodles.
4. Serve noodles hot or cold with 2 to 4 scallops on top, and garnish with sesame seeds and cilantro.

NUTRITION INFO PER SERVING: 378.7 calories; 8.4 g fat; 1.6 g saturated fat; 9.9 mg cholesterol; 14.3 g protein; 60.1 g carbohydrates; 0.8 g fiber; 797.8 mg sodium
Blackened Striped Bass With Braised Garlic Greens
SERVES 4

1 pound striped bass
4 whole cloves garlic, skin removed
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
2 teaspoons paprika
2 teaspoons dried thyme
2 teaspoons dried oregano
2 teaspoons black pepper
3 to 4 tablespoons olive oil
1 to 2 large bunch(es) of spinach greens

1. Rinse the fish and cut into portions. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add 2 garlic cloves, browning on all sides until the oil is infused with the garlic flavor. Remove garlic and discard.
2. Combine salt, cayenne, paprika, thyme, oregano, and pepper on a plate, and coat the fish on both sides. Place fish in the skillet and sear over medium-high heat for 4 to 5 minutes on each side, or until fish is white and flakes when prodded with a fork. Set aside.
3. Heat the remaining oil over medium heat. Add the remaining garlic to the skillet and brown slightly. Add the greens and cover; cook until the greens have reduced by half, about 7 to 10 minutes. They should retain their color but be soft and edible.
4. Serve fish over greens.

Nutrition info per serving: 285 calories; 14.6 g fat; 2.3 g saturated fat; 116.7 mg cholesterol; 31.3 g protein; 5.2 g carbohydrates; 5.2 g fiber; 817.4 mg sodium

Wild Smoked Salmon Dip
SERVES 12

2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
1 tablespoon lemon juice
8 ounces light, organic cream cheese
6 ounces wild Pacific smoked salmon

1. Combine first three ingredients in a food processor; add 3 ounces of the salmon and process until smooth. Fold in remaining salmon and serve with whole grain crackers.

Nutrition info per serving: 58.1 calories; 3.2 g fat; 1.9 g saturated fat; 16.3 mg cholesterol; 5.3 g protein; 1.7 g carbohydrates; 0 g fiber; 170 mg sodium

Light Shrimp Salad
SERVES 6

1 pound cooked shrimp, deveined, shells and tails removed
½ cup lime juice, preferably fresh-squeezed
½ cup lemon juice, preferably fresh-squeezed
¼ cup white onion, diced
1 jalapeño pepper, stemmed, seeded, and diced
⅓ cup chopped fresh cilantro
1 tomato, seeded and diced
1 tablespoon olive oil
Salt, to taste

1. Chop shrimp into chunks and combine with the next three ingredients in a medium-sized bowl; let sit, refrigerated, for 1 to 4 hours. Since the shrimp is already cooked, this allows the flavors to meld, rather than letting the citrus juice actually cook the fish, like in a ceviche.
2. Just before serving, stir in the remaining ingredients. Serve with tortilla chips.

Nutrition info per serving: 119.1 calories; 3.2 g fat; 0.5 g saturated fat; 147.3 mg cholesterol; 16.5 g protein; 6.6 g carbohydrates; 1 g fiber; 172.4 mg sodium