Did you know heart disease can be prevented with the intake of seafood? Seafood intake in the United States is currently at about 3 ½ ounces per week, but according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010, 8 ounces per week is recommended. Nutrients in seafood such as omega-3 fatty acids, eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), are associated with reduced cardiac deaths among those with or without cardiovascular disease. Consuming a variety of seafood in amounts recommended outweigh the health risks associated with methyl mercury. Seafood varieties that are commonly consumed in the United States that are higher in EPA and DHA and lower in mercury include salmon, anchovies, herring, sardines, Pacific oysters, trout, and Atlantic and Pacific mackerel. High methyl mercury content seafood includes tilefish, shark, swordfish, and king mackerel.

Besides the health benefits of the general public, seafood is also important for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding due to positive health outcomes of the infant, such as visual and cognitive development. It is recommended that women who are pregnant or breastfeed to consume 8 to 12 ounces of a variety of seafood that are low in methyl mercury.

When buying seafood it is important to use safety precautions whether it is fresh or frozen. The following are signs to look for when buying seafood:

**Fresh**

- No darkening or drying around the edges should appear on the fish.
- Smell should be fresh and mild, not fishy, sour, or ammonia-like.
- Eyes should be clear and bulge a little.
- The flesh should spring back when pressed.

**Frozen**

- Avoid buying seafood in open, torn, or crushed packages.
- Avoid buying packages above the “frozen line” or top of the freezer case.
- Don’t buy fish that has signs of frost or ice crystals.

Properly thawing seafood is also important and should be done by placing the frozen seafood in the refrigerator overnight. If you need to thaw the seafood quickly, place it in a tightly sealed plastic bag and immerse it into cold water.

It is important to keep your seafood safe until you eat it. If you plan to use it within two days, store it in the refrigerator. If the seafood will not be used within two days, store it in the freezer in a tightly, moisture proof packaging.

Cross-Contamination can easily occur between raw seafood and ready-to-eat food. To avoid cross-contamination:
Step-up your Seafood with Safety
Molly Cernosek, Texas A&M University Dietetic Intern; Rebecca Dittmar, Extension Program Specialist, Food Protection Management
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- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water before and after handling raw food.
- Wash the cutting board with soap and warm water to remove any contaminants.

Some individuals are at greater risk of developing food borne illnesses, and should not eat raw or partially cooked seafood. These individuals include pregnant women, young children, older adults, immune-suppressed individuals, and individuals with decreased stomach acidity.

Whether you buy and eat fresh or frozen seafood, take advantage of its health benefits and consume at least 8 ounces per week.

References

Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010; www.dietaryguidelines.gov

U.S. Food and Drug Administration Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition; www.cfsan.fda.gov