

# Smart Seafood Guide



## Did You Know?

**Not all seafood is created equal.** Much of the fish available today in the United States is imported, frequently from places where health, safety and environmental standards for growing or catching fish are weak or non-existent. Less than 2 percent of seafood imports to the U.S. are inspected for contamination. Also, many popular wild fish have been managed poorly and are depleted, are caught using gear that can hurt habitat and other wildlife, and/or contain substances like mercury or PCBs that can cause serious health problems.

Fortunately, there are still good domestic seafood options. This card provides safer and more sustainable alternatives to many popular fish nationwide. For additional local alternatives in specific regions see:

[www.foodandwaterwatch.org/fish](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/fish)

**Tip:** Try a variety of seafood types to reduce exposure to contaminants and to lower pressure on over-popular seafood choices.

## Questions to Ask About Your Seafood

**Where is it from?** Choose domestic over imported.

CONTINUED >>

**Is it caught or farmed locally?** Choose local foods over those shipped from far away.

**Is it farmed or wild?** Choose wild, unless otherwise stated on the card.

**How is it caught?** Ask if the method has high bycatch or habitat damage — favor fish caught by hook and line, handline, troll, jig or speargun.

**How is it farmed?** Choose seafood that has been farmed in the United States, especially in low- or no-output, recirculating systems. Tilapia, shrimp, seabream and cobia are examples of fish that are or are soon to be farmed this way in the United States.

**Is it associated with any contaminants?** Avoid mercury, PCBs and antibiotics.

## 5 Things to Consider When Ordering Seafood

**1. Local fish are few and far between:** While diners at coastal restaurants often look forward to ordering seafood, much of the fish at restaurants and in stores is not local. Due to high demand, seafood on these menus often comes from other states or countries, so always remember to ask rather than assume that seafood is local and sustainable.

CONTINUED >>

## 2. “Atlantic” salmon is farmed salmon:

While Alaskan wild-caught salmon can be a healthy, sustainable option, farmed salmon is associated with environmental and social problems. One red-flag is salmon labeled as “Atlantic.” As wild Atlantic salmon populations have been driven close to extinction, salmon from this ocean are almost surely farmed.

**3. “Organic” seafood is not what it seems:** There are no legal organic standards for seafood in the U.S., so fish labeled “organic” are imported, usually from northern Europe. Also keep in mind that seafood labeled as organic is farmed, not wild-caught.

**4. Beware of imported shrimp:** Although the U.S. has many healthy shrimp fisheries that support coastal communities, about 90 percent of the shrimp consumed in the United States is imported. Much of it comes from farms that are associated with heavy chemical use, environmental destruction and negative impacts for local communities.

**5. Bivalve shellfish are often good options:** In some cases, bivalve shellfish, like mussels, oysters and clams, are the most likely seafood items at restaurants or markets to be

CONTINUED >>

sustainably sourced. These fish are filter feeders, which means that even when farmed they can help to improve local environments by cleaning up water. Just remember to ask about local contaminant warnings, and in the case of clams, whether they are hand-raked or dredged.

## Dirty Dozen

Here’s a quick guide to our “dirty dozen” of common seafood choices nationwide that we give a big thumbs down.

- **Atlantic cod**
- **Atlantic flatfish**, e.g. Atlantic halibut, flounder and sole
- **Caviar**, especially from beluga and other wild-caught sturgeon
- **Chilean seabass**
- **Eel**
- **Farmed salmon**, often called “Atlantic salmon”
- **Imported basa/swai/tra**, often labeled “catfish” (**Tip:** Ask where it is from and check country of origin labels)
- **Imported farmed shrimp**
- **Imported king crab**
- **Orange roughy**
- **Sharks**
- **Atlantic bluefin tuna**

# National Seafood Substitution Recommendations From Food & Water Watch

How to use this card: Look for the type of seafood you like and find safer, more sustainable recommendations below. The better choice may be a more specific type of fish, or sometimes we suggest a substitution.

## FILLET FISH



### Mild, white fish

**IF YOU LIKE:** catfish, Chilean seabass, flounder, halibut, orange roughy, pollock, sole

**TRY:** hook-and-line-caught haddock; California, Washington and Oregon halibut; mahi-mahi\*; U.S.-farmed catfish; U.S.-farmed tilapia; yellowtail snapper; Pacific sole



### Thicker, more flavorful fish

**IF YOU LIKE:** grouper, jack, mackerel, salmon, snapper, tuna, wahoo

**TRY:** Alaskan salmon\*, Atlantic mackerel, pole-caught skipjack tuna\*, black cod (sablefish), mangrove/gray snapper, Pacific albacore tuna\*, Pacific cod (not trawl-caught), pompano, U.S.-farmed barramundi, wreckfish



### Steak-like fish

**IF YOU LIKE:** bonito, salmon, shark, swordfish, tuna

**TRY:** Alaskan salmon\*, Atlantic mackerel, mahi-mahi\*, Pacific albacore tuna\*, California, Washington and Oregon halibut

\*Choose pole- or troll-caught fish



These recommendations are intended as a general reference. They are not intended to provide specific medical advice, supplant any government warnings or otherwise prevent exposure to any health hazards associated with seafood. People should always follow proper acquisition, handling and cooking procedures to any seafood they prepare or consume. The devastating April 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico may have ongoing effects on the availability of some seafood items on this card.

## SHELLFISH & MORE



**IF YOU LIKE:** abalone, clams, conch, escargot, oysters, mussels

**TRY:** U.S.-farmed abalone, U.S.-farmed escargot, U.S.-farmed mussels, U.S.-farmed oysters, U.S. wild-caught or farmed crawfish, U.S. wild hand-raked or farmed clams



**IF YOU LIKE:** calamari and octopus

**TRY:** Atlantic trap- or net-caught squid, "California" (U.S. Pacific market) squid



**IF YOU LIKE:** crab and lobster

**TRY:** U.S. wild-caught crabs including Alaskan king, dungeness, golden, rock ("peekytoe") and stone; Jonah crab; "Maine" lobster (American)



**IF YOU LIKE:** scallops

**TRY:** U.S. diver-caught scallops



**IF YOU LIKE:** shrimp

**TRY:** U.S. wild-caught shrimp, especially South Atlantic white, Pacific ("Oregon") pinks, Florida ("Key West" or "Tortugas") pinks; U.S.-farmed shrimp



**IF YOU LIKE:** small, very flavorful fish (like sardines and anchovies)

**TRY:** purse seine-caught Atlantic herring, U.S. wild-caught anchovies, U.S. wild-caught sardines