

# Fish Information

## Choosing Fresh Fish:

**Look for fresh seafood.** Fresh fish has a moist, bright lustrous surface. Select fish that doesn't have dry spots and discoloration. Avoid seafood that is overly fishy-smelling.

**Select whole fish that has bright, clear eyes and shiny, well-attached scales.** Also look for bright pink or red gills and firm, springy flesh. If only frozen fish is available, buy fish still frozen rather than defrosted.

**Keep fish cold.** Securely wrap fresh fish and shellfish in a plastic bag or moisture-proof paper and store toward the back of your refrigerator, which tends to be the coldest spot. Use fresh fish within two days, and preferably one day, of purchase. Store frozen seafood up to six months for lean varieties and up to three months for fattier fish, such as salmon or tuna.

## How Much Fish to Buy

Cooked crabmeat, cooked lobster meat, surimi seafoods, cooked and peeled shrimp, raw scallops, raw cleaned squid--about 1/4 to 1/3 lb. per person

Whole or round fish--3/4 to 1 lb. per person

Dressed or clean fish--1/2 to 3/4 lb. per person

Fillets and steaks--1/3 to 1/2 lb. per person

Live 1 to 2 lb. lobster, 1-2 lb. crabs, 12-15 mussels, 6-12 oysters (depending on size), 6-12 clams (depending on size), per person

## Freezing Fresh Fish:

Fish for freezing should be fresh as possible. Wash fish and remove scales by scraping fish gently from tail to head with the dull edge of the knife or spoon. Remove entrails after cutting entire length of belly from vent to head. Remove head by cutting above collarbone. Break backbone over edge of cutting board or table. Remove dorsal or large back fin by cutting flesh along each side and pulling fin out. Do not trim fins with shears or a knife because bones will be left at the base of the fin. Wash fish thoroughly in cold running water. Fish is now dressed or pan dressed, depending on size. Freeze small fish in one piece. Cut large fish into 1 inch thick steaks or fillets.

Large fish should be cut into steaks or fillets for easier cooking. For steaks, cut fish crosswise into 3/4-inch thick steaks. For fillets, cut down back of fish from tail to head. Then cut down to backbone just above collarbone. Turn knife flat and cut flesh along backbone to tail allowing knife to run over rib bones. Lift off entire side of fish in one piece, freeing fillet at tail. Turn fish over and cut fillet from other side.

You can choose from several packaging methods. Packages should not be more than 1 inch thick.

Wrap fish tightly in "cling wrap" or similar moisture and vapor proof material. Keep as much air as possible out of the package. Overwrap packaged fish with freezer paper or aluminum foil to protect the "cling wrap."

Place fish in "zip-lock" plastic freezer bags. Press the bag gently to remove air, or use a straw to suck air out of bag. Seal the bag. Overwrap packaged fish with freezer paper or aluminum foil to protect the freezer bag.

Place fish in vacuum packaging bag without getting the sealing area of the bag wet. Follow the manufacturers instructions for creating a vacuum and sealing the bag.

Place fish in 1 inch thick rigid plastic sandwich containers or milk cartons. Fill container to the top and seal. Cover the fish with water before sealing, if desired, to prevent drying or oxidation of the fish during storage.

Label packages with type of fish and date.

Freeze quickly in single layers in the freezer.

A 1-inch thick package will freeze completely in about 16 hours. Thicker packages, or packages stacked on top of each other during freezing, will take several hours longer.

### **Freezing Smoked Fish:**

Freeze smoked fish as soon as you remove it from the smoker.

If you desire, brush pieces of smoked fish with bland salad oil to slow dehydration and oxidation during frozen storage.

Package and freeze as described in "Freezing Fish," steps 3 (a- c), 4 and 5.

### **Cooking Fresh Fish:**

Cook frozen fish within one day of defrosting.

#### **Fish-Suitable Cooking Methods**

Fish is the original "fast food". It cooks quickly-within minutes-because it lacks the connective tissue of red meats and poultry. Some of the best cooking methods for fish include poaching, broiling, grilling, baking and microwaving because they bring out flavor without adding fat.

#### **Baking**

Whole fish, whole stuffed fish, fillets, stuffed fillets, steaks and chunks of fish may be baked. Use pieces of similar size for even cooking. It's best to bake fish in a preheated, 450° F oven following the 10-minute rule; bake uncovered, basting if desired.

TIP: For a quick and delicious dinner, bake fish on a bed of chopped vegetables. Try a mixture of onions, celery and carrots or a combination of mushrooms, onions and peppers.

## **Broiling**

Steaks, whole fish, split whole fish and fillets lend themselves well to broiling. Place fish, one-inch thick or less, two to four inches from the heat source. Place thicker pieces five to six inches away. Baste frequently with an oil-based marinade. Using the 10-minute rule, cook on one side for half the total cooking time, basting once or twice, then turn the fish over to continue broiling and basting.

## **Grilling**

This technique lends itself well to meatier or steak fish such as salmon, halibut, swordfish, tuna and whole fish. Preheat an outdoor gas or electric grill. If using a barbecue grill, start the fire about 30 minutes before cooking. Let it burn until white hot then spread coals out in a single layer. Adjust the grill height to 4 to 6 inches above the heat.

To grill fish, a moderately hot fire is best for cooking seafood. Always start with a well oiled grid to prevent the delicate skin of the fish from sticking. Support more delicate pieces of fish in a hinged, fish-shaped wire basket for easier turning or handling.

Frequently baste steaks and fillets while grilling to prevent them from drying out. Marinating fish an hour before grilling also helps keep it moist. Apply the 10-minute rule for proper doneness. Use indirect heat for whole fish by banking hot coals on either side of the barbecue or preheat gas or electric grill. Oil fish well and place in an oiled fish basket. Cook, covered, 10 to 12 minutes per inch of thickness, turning halfway through cooking time.

## **Microwaving**

Use a shallow dish to allow maximum exposure to the microwaves. Arrange fillets with the thicker parts pointing outward and the thinner parts, separated by pieces of plastic wrap, overlapping in the center of the dish. Cover dish with plastic wrap and vent by turning back one corner. Allow 3 minutes per pound of boneless fish cooked on high as a guide. Rotate the dish halfway through the cooking time. Rolled fillets microwave more evenly and are less likely to over-cook than flat fillets, which may have thin edges.

## **Poaching**

Poach fish in simmering liquid such as fish stock, water with aromatic herbs/vegetables, or a mixture of wine and water. In a large skillet, saute pan or fish poacher, ring the liquid to a boil. Add the fish and return to boiling. Quickly reduce to a simmer-the liquid should barely bubble. Cover and begin timing the fish according to the 10-minute rule. The remaining liquid can be used to make a sauce for fish if desired.

## **Sautéing or Pan-frying**

An excellent method for fillets and pan-dressed fish like trout, tilapia and catfish.

*TIP: Dip the fish into seasoned flour, cornmeal or bread crumbs just before sauteing. Heat a small amount of olive oil or butter in a skillet large enough to hold the fish. When the pan is very hot, place the fish into the skillet. Sauté for half the total time as determined by the 10-minute*

*rule, turn over and complete cooking.*

### **Steaming**

Whole fish, chunks, steaks and stuffed fillets steam well. To steam finfish, fill a large sauce pan with one inch of water. Place the fish on a steamer rack and put the rack in the pan. The water should not exceed the height of the rack. Cover tightly and bring the water to a boil. Using the 10-minute rule, steam until thoroughly cooked.

### **Stir-Frying**

This cooking method is a very fast technique, so it's important to have all ingredients in uniform size and ready for cooking.

Using a wok or large skillet, coat the bottom and sides with vegetable oil. Add the fish and stir-fry, tossing gently to coat on all sides, until about three quarters cooked, approximately two to four minutes. Remove to a warm platter.

Stir-fry a selection of sliced vegetables (i.e. carrots, onions, bell peppers, zucchini, and mushrooms) in addition to a light sauce if desired. Return the fish to the wok or skillet and cook one to two minutes more. Serve immediately.