

The Health Benefits of Eating Seafood

Seafood can be divided into two basic categories, shellfish and fish. Both of these groups contain sub-categories.

Within the shellfish group, there are univalves (e.g., snails, conchs, and abalones), bivalves (e.g., oysters, clams, mussels, and scallops), crustaceans (e.g., lobsters, crabs, and shrimp), and cephalopods (octopuses and squid.).

Within the fish group, there are round fish (e.g., bass, salmon, and catfish), flat fish (e.g., flounder, halibut, and sole), and non-bony fish (e.g., shark, skate, and monkfish).

Seafood contains all the quality and nutrition that consumers demand. This is important for consumers because a nutritious diet can lead to better health. The following are the most important characteristics of seafood:

- Seafood is an **excellent source of high-quality protein** that contains sufficient amounts of essential amino acids that the human body needs.
- Seafood is **high in many vitamins**, especially D and the B group. Seafood is low in sodium but is an excellent source of important minerals, including iodine, calcium, zinc, potassium, and phosphorus.
- Seafood has **less connective tissue** than red meat and poultry, which makes it easy to chew and digest. This makes it a good choice for children and the elderly.
- Seafood is generally a **low-calorie food** when compared to red meat and poultry, so consumers can eat fewer calories while meeting their daily protein needs.
- Most seafood has **low levels of saturated fat** with more unsaturated and polyunsaturated fat. Therefore, seafood is a great replacement for a diet rich in pork, beef, and other higher-fat animal sources. Eating fish can help lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease.
- The most important benefit of eating seafood is that it is **high in omega-3 fatty acids**, particularly docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). Omega-3 fatty acid is a type of polyun-



saturated fat and is an essential nutrient that our bodies cannot make. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in most seafood, including oily and non-oily fish and shellfish.

Benefits of Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are believed to help—

- Decrease the risk of breast, colon, and prostate cancers.
- Weight loss.
- Lower the formation of blood clots that can cause heart attack.
- Reduce blood triglyceride levels and stroke.
- Protect the immune system.
- Improve skin condition.
- Prevent the spread of some cancers.
- Stabilize mood and treat mood disorders.
- Reduce the risk of sudden cardiac death.

A study at the Harvard School of Public Health found that eating one or two servings of fish each week reduces the risk of sudden cardiac death and can save more than 120,000 lives each year. For all these benefits, the American Heart Association recommends eating two or three seafood meals each week.



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