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# **Guide to buying best quality seafood**

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## Guide to buying best quality seafood

**As the public body that supports the UK seafood industry, we're passionate about encouraging the nation to enjoy the fantastic variety of fish and shellfish available. This document provides guidance and handy tips, which consumers can use to ensure they know what to look for when purchasing quality fresh, chilled or frozen seafood.**

### Buying Fresh or Chilled Fish and Shellfish

Chilled, packaged or over-the-counter fish and shellfish is one of the most popular choices when purchasing seafood in the supermarket.

Seafood can take between two and 12 days to reach a retailer, but as long as it has been stored correctly, the length of time since the fish or shellfish was caught shouldn't be cause for concern.

Fish found in the chilled aisle of a supermarket has often previously been frozen and defrosted before it is put on the shelf for sale - it will say 'defrosted' on the packaging. This is perfectly acceptable within Food Standards Agency regulations and helps to ensure we have access to a wide range of seafood all year round. As seafood is frozen quickly after it's caught, this also helps to retain freshness and make sure it's still a best quality product when it reaches the supermarket shelves.

In order to ensure seafood is at its best, it's important to make sure it's refrigerated at a temperature lower than 4°C. If you're travelling to the supermarket or shop, it's a good idea to bring a cool bag or box to keep your purchases cool until you get home to avoid spoiling, especially if it's warm outside.

In the UK, we're lucky to have over 100 different species of seafood available to buy and enjoy. There are lots of things to look out for when shopping at a supermarket or fishmonger. These vary depending on the fish or shellfish purchased, so we've pulled together a handy checklist for some of the most popular species.

#### White Fish

What to look for when purchasing best quality white fish fillets, such as cod, haddock, coley or pollock:

No strong smells - there should not be a strong 'fishy' smell or unpleasant odour

- Translucent in colour – fresh fillets should be translucent while raw and never white
- Tightly-knitted texture – the flakes of fish fillets should be knitted close together with no gaps between them

### **Oily Fish**

Oily fish, such as mackerel or sardines, are often purchased whole and a few key signs will help to tell if they are fresh:

- Firm body and glossy shine – the fish should be rigid when held and the skin will have a glossy shine
- Deep red gills – a fishmonger will happily show you the inside of the gills of a fish, which should be deep red in colour
- Bright eyes – the eyes are key when purchasing a whole fish and if fresh, they will be bright with no cloudiness
- Oily smell – as with white fish, oily species shouldn't have a strong smell although you may find they smell a little like omega 3 or cod liver oil capsules

### **Prawns**

When purchasing whole prawns, check for the following:

- Sweet smell – fresh prawns will have a sweet smell of the sea but, just like other species, shouldn't smell unpleasant or overly 'fishy'
- Vibrant pink colour – if purchased in their shells, prawns should be bright pink in colour
- Crisp shell – best quality prawns will have a slightly hard shell that is not soft or squishy

### **Mussels**

Mussels are one of the easiest species to check for freshness, simply ensure they have:

- No cracks or damage – mussel shells shouldn't be cracked or damaged
- Tightly closed shells – tap any open shells gently and, if a mussel is still alive, it will close

## **Buying Frozen Fish and Shellfish**

Buying frozen seafood is a great way to ensure you're getting the best quality produce.

Freezing at source locks in the freshness and, just like vegetables, the freezing process helps to preserve the nutrients of seafood and is just as good as buying chilled. Fish or shellfish which has been 'frozen at sea' will be frozen within minutes or hours of being caught.

When purchasing and storing frozen seafood, you should check that the packaging is not damaged and that there's no sign of freezer burn, frost or ice crystals which could indicate it's been stored for a long time or has been thawed and refrozen.

## Quality Testing in the Seafood Industry

Sensory assessment is the best way to check if seafood is fresh. Our industry uses a scoring system developed by the Torry Research Station in Aberdeen to establish the freshness and quality of fish. There are several other systems available but Torry assessment remains the fastest and most accurate method for determining freshness.

A scoring sheet is used, ideally on cooked produce, to rate the flavour, texture, mouth feel and appearance of seafood. Experts use the system to score white fish like cod and haddock on a scale of three to ten. Fresh fish straight from the sea would score ten on the scale, while very spoiled fish would score at a three.

The Torry scales can be used to establish how long fish or shellfish has been stored on ice from zero to 20 days or more. But as mentioned previously, seafood can be kept for a long time and still remain good quality providing that it has been stored correctly.

White fish develops its delicious flavours after one to two days on ice, at around Torry 9. Usually, a Torry score of six (indicating approximately 11 days on ice) is considered the cut off point for sale as this is the stage that unpleasant flavours and odours will begin to develop.

Generally, once cooked, seafood is safe to eat at all levels of the Torry Scoring System, however, it will lose its delicious flavour and generally becomes noticeably unpalatable and inedible if it is past it's best.

Both chilled and frozen (look for 'frozen at sea' on the packaging) seafood with a high freshness quality can be found in most good quality retailers.



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## About Us

Seafish is a non-departmental public body (NDPB), supporting the £10bn UK seafood industry from catch to plate. Our vision is for a seafood industry that is truly thriving and we use our unique position, right at the heart of industry, to work in partnership with businesses, Government and other stakeholders to make progress together.

We are funded by a levy on the first sale of seafood in the UK which we use to deliver research, campaigns and events, business and industry support tools, information networks and training for the seafood industry.

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