

# Seafood Basics

## CULINARY CONNECTION



A look at seafood procurement, storage, menu planning, and preparation

Seafood is becoming more popular with our residents every day and is an important part of offering a menu with plenty of variety. It also presents some special challenges. It's perishable, delicate, expensive, and can be tricky to cook. Taking all of this into consideration, let's look at seafood in terms of selection, procurement, receiving, storage, menu planning, and preparation.

There are two basic categories of seafood: fish and shellfish. Within the category of fish are the sub-categories *round fish* (like salmon, catfish, and tilapia), *flat fish* (like flounder and sole), and *non-bony fish* (like skate and monkfish.) Shellfish can be broken down into sub-categories, too. There are *univalves* (like snails), *bivalves* (like oysters and clams), *crustaceans* (like shrimp and crab), and *cephalopods* (like octopus and squid).

While negative things have been said about some aspects of farm-raised seafood, it's a reality we live with that can offer consistent products, year-round, at good prices. What you lose in character in comparison to wild-caught products, you gain in consistency and availability. High-quality, flash-frozen items can also be an important part of your seafood program. They allow you to buy a few extra cases when they're on sale, assuming you have the freezer space, and can be a big help if your deliveries are limited.

Offering fresh—not frozen—seafood to your residents will always be appreciated. If you intend to go this route, even for just parts of your menu, you'll need to develop a good working relationship with a reliable vendor who possibly only deals in fresh seafood. This is one area where quality and service are more important than the lowest price. Since seafood is so



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perishable, look for a vendor who will provide frequent deliveries. If this is not possible, you can plan your menu around the available delivery dates. Your vendor must be fastidious in how they handle the product. This should include using shaved ice, high-quality butchering, refrigerated trucks, intelligent routing, and extreme cleanliness. Take a tour of their facility and be sure you like what you see (and smell).

When receiving an order of fresh seafood, be sure that whoever checks it in does so carefully and knows what to look for. The most important thing to do is to smell it. If it doesn't have a nice, clean scent of the sea, reject it. If this happens more than very rarely, replace the vendor. Crabs should show signs of movement. Clams and oysters should be shut tight. If a few are open, discard them, and if more than a few are open, reject all of them. As with checking in any order, it's a good idea to use a scale. Seafood is too expensive to not catch a vendor's mistake. Take extra care even when checking in frozen seafood. Closely examine the box and product within for any signs of thawing and re-freezing, and reject any orders that do. Put them into your freezer immediately, rotating with any existing stock.

Storing fresh seafood takes more care than most items. If possible, order just enough for a couple of days at a time. The longer you store it, the more important it is to make an extra effort in how you do so. After receiving fresh whole fish, rinse them under cold running water. Place the fish in shaved ice (if available), belly down, in perforated hotel pans over non-perforated pans. Fill the cavities with shaved ice, and cover with more. It's fine to make more than one layer. Place the pans on a shelf in your cooler. The perforated pans keep the fish from sitting in water which hastens spoiling, and shaved

metal packaging they come in, on ice, in a cooler. Live shellfish—like crabs—should be stored in their shipping containers, or wrapped in damp paper and stored in your cooler, but not iced. Live oysters and clams can be stored in the bags they come in. Keep the bags closed tightly and don't ice them. Frozen products like fish and shrimp should be stored at -20°F to 0°F. The best way to thaw them is in the cooler. If time won't allow, they can be thawed in a sink under cold running water. Make a note to take them out of the freezer and put into the cooler earlier next time.



**THE MOST IMPORTANT** thing to do when first receiving an order of fresh seafood is to smell it. If it doesn't have a nice, clean scent of the sea, reject it.

ice bruises the fish less than cubes, while doing a better job of providing even chilling. Switch the fish out to clean pans daily using the same icing procedure. Depending on how fresh it was when it was delivered, fish stored in this way can last several days. The closer any necessary butchering is done to the cooking, the better.

Fresh fish fillets should be stored in the plastic or

Any type of fish has four main characteristics: flavor, texture, fat content, and preferred cooking methods. If you know what you're after in terms of these attributes, you'll be able to decide which fish to choose, and how to make a substitution when needed. If you want a mild fish with a flaky texture that's not too rich that you can sear or broil, tilapia will do the job. With

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a more generous budget, so would red snapper. If you were after something with a little more flavor, a firmer texture, and richer that you could grill or poach, salmon would be a good choice. Think about what you're really after, and try different options. Your vendor should be able to make good suggestions, especially if you ask good questions.

Shellfish is very popular and can be prepared in many different ways. Whether poached and chilled, fried, served in gumbo or bisque, or stir-fried, shrimp will always be a treat. You'll make a lot

of friends in the dining room serving crab cakes and clam fritters, too. Depending on your budget, you may not be able to have these items on your menu every day, but try to get them on your rotation when you can.

Handling seafood requires a little more care than most other foods. Make sure the product is chilled at all times until you're actually prepping it, and then again until you're cooking it. When prepping seafood, do it in small batches, keeping the rest in the cooler until needed. Keep the product you're working with on a pan


of ice on the station. Use the same precautions at service when cooking. Take smaller batches out of the cooler as needed, and keep them on ice as much as possible on the line. For the most part, the less time hot items are held before being served, the better. Try to plan your cooking with that in mind. At the end of service, put any unused items back in the cooler as soon as possible, on fresh ice if called for.

It's easy to overcook seafood. Don't do it! More than most things, seafood is best when it's cooked just right. The

USDA specifies that fish and shellfish should be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 145°F. Not going much higher than that will insure a moist, tender product that people will love. Not paying attention will result in tough, rubbery, dried-out food that won't win you any praise. While cooking, check the temperature frequently. Remember, you can always cook something a little more, but you can't cook it a little less. ■


# CDM CFPP

## What CDM, CFPP Means to Me...



**Robin Kalinowski,**  
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Nutritional Services  
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Sanford Health,  
Bismarck, ND

*"Becoming a CDM, CFPP has allowed me to move forward in my career goals. I am an expert in food service and food safety. I have met so many new people at the ANFP Annual Conference & Expo and on the Open Forum."*



**Terri McGhee,**  
**CDM, CFPP**  
AYR Patient Service  
Manager,  
Sodexo for Springhill  
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*"Being a CDM, CFPP is a great personal accomplishment. Being in the food industry for over 30 years has given me a feeling of great success. I love this industry, and this made it all come together!"*

## CE Questions | CULINARY CONNECTION



This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.

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- Seafood presents special challenges because it is
  - Salty, stringy, and contains gluten
  - Perishable, delicate, and can be tricky to cook
  - Expensive, inconsistent, and hard to source
- The two basic categories of seafood are
  - Fish and shellfish
  - Snails and shrimp
  - Bivalves and clams
- Farm-raised seafood can offer
  - Just-in-time delivery
  - Products of any size requested
  - Consistent products year-round at a good price
- When receiving an order of fresh seafood,
  - It should be examined under a black light
  - Rubber gloves should be worn
  - The most important thing is to smell it
- Extra care is taken when storing seafood
  - To keep it as fresh as possible
  - So Health Department inspectors can easily find it
  - To keep it separate from pork products
- Any type of fish has four main characteristics:
  - Flavor, color, size, and preferred cooking methods
  - Flavor, texture, fat content, and preferred cooking methods
  - Size, shape, color, and flavor
- Cooking seafood much past the USDA minimum required internal temperature of 145°F
  - Will result in food that is tough and rubbery
  - Will result in food that is dried-out and unpopular
  - All of the above

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