



hooked on fish!

A few quick tips and simple recipes will help you reel your family in to the table for delicious and very nutritious seafood suppers by **Lisa Cherkasky**

The longer, warmer days of an Atlantic seaboard spring lure us all outside to shake off our winter cobwebs. Want to run indoors at the last second to prepare dinner? Casting about for quick, nutritious recipes? Put seafood on the menu. Both fin and shellfish cook faster than almost anything and both are nearly pure sources of protein. Mild and sweet-flavored flounder, halibut, salmon or crabmeat are just a few of the tasty choices available this time of year. Fishing for smiles from your kids? Shrimp is an all-time-favorite finger food.

Let me get this out of the way first: If you set your kids up to think that fish is weird, then they will think that fish is weird. "Americans tend to have a fear of fish so they end up eating it fried at restaurants, negating many of the benefits of eating fish," says Susan Stuck, editor of *Miavita*, a health and wellness Web site. Not to put too fine a point on it, serve seafood often, as you do all healthy foods, and eat it with gusto; your kids will follow suit.

Fish is Brain Food

And skinny food, too. Almost entirely protein, most seafoods are extremely lean. Want even better news? Major studies have indicated that fish fats are good fats. "Omega-3 fatty acids, found in appreciable amounts in salmon, lake trout, and mackerel, may contribute to the development of visual acuity, as well as brain and heart function," reports Katherine Tallmadge, a well-known nutritionist and American Dietetic Association spokesperson. All your kids need know is that seafood is yummy.

Keep 'em Biting

My linguine has been barren of mussels since my son tasted his first mollusk. Our *modus operandi* ever since? He scarfs the mussels and mama makes do

with pasta alone. No longer the maverick, his 5-year-old friends now love mussels too. Another mom reported pretending to be walruses at dinner-time and that she, the mama walrus, had just gone hunting for fish. Baby walrus noises and all, the family had a lovely meal of sea bass. Modeling good behavior works (perhaps not as soon as you'd like) and mealtime is an especially effective time to demonstrate enjoyment. Think positive reinforcement and patience, patience, patience.

Not Just a Fish Tale

Two small but important warnings: Delay eating shellfish until well after the child's first birthday to avoid the risks that could come with an allergic reaction.





Spring Catch in the Mid-Atlantic

Before you buy, ask your fishmonger what is best that day. Remember that many varieties of fish are interchangeable within a recipe. In other words, it is better to cook by what looks good in the case, rather than what the recipe dictates. Firm, white fish in particular can be switched in and out of recipes. Sticking to a seasonal catch is your most economical way to shop, as well. If in doubt, ask the experts at the fish counter. Best cooked the day it is purchased, pick up fresh fish on your way home from work or while you are out doing that day's errands.

What's available this time of year?

Shellfish

- **Clams**
Clam linguine is an enticing way to introduce kids to this mollusk.
- **Mussels**
Nowadays, most mussels are rope-grown (farmed) in Maine or Prince Edward Island, keeping them beautifully orange, pristine, and petite—in other words, kid-pleasers. Versatile and inexpensive, farmed mussels are parent-pleasers too.
- **Shrimp**
Available year-round and always a treat.
- **Scallops**
They're so sweet and rich, no one can resist.

Fish

Interchangeable in many recipes, provided the fillets are of the same thickness.

- **Grouper**
- **Tilapia**
- **Cod**
- **Haddock**
- **Flounder**
- **Trout**
- **Halibut**
- **Orange Roughy**
(A little pricy, but worth it.)
- **Catfish**

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Pregnant and lactating women should avoid eating freshwater fish and large ocean fish such as shark, tuna (canned is okay), and swordfish due to the risks involved with heavy metal and pesticide contamination. 🐟

Lisa Cherkasky, a Washington, D.C.-based writer, enjoys fresh seafood from the Mid-Atlantic year-round with her 5-year-old son, Teddy.

set your bait

Sue Levinsky, seafood manager at the Red Lion Road Acme in Philadelphia, recommends having the skin removed before offering haddock (or any other fish) to kids.

Stick to simple preparations; a little lemon, a light sprinkling of herbs, a bit of butter or olive oil and then just pop the fish under the broiler until firm and opaque. Should you marinate? Bottled oil and vinegar salad dressing couldn't be more foolproof. Or stir together a little orange juice concentrate and soy sauce and brush it over fillets, steaks, scallops, or shrimp. Grill or broil briefly, just till firm and opaque. Kids love kebabs. Shrimp, scallops, or chunks of firm fish all grill beautifully. You might even be able to sneak a few vegetables onto the skewer. On the side? Keep it simple. Rice, baked potatoes, roasted potato wedges, grape tomatoes, carrot sticks, or other raw veggies are all perfect. Green beans or broccoli go nicely, as well. A bit of butter and salt and, voilà, dinner is on the table.