



# Get Your Kid Hooked on Fish

Brain booster. Mood improver. Skin saver. Seafood is all that and more. If it weren't for mercury, you'd serve it every day. We help you strike a balance. BY CHERYL LOCK

MONICA BUCK FOOD STYLING BY MICHAEL PETERSON PROP STYLING BY CATHY COOK

Cooking seafood for dinner may seem like it's not worth the effort. With all the confusing news about mercury and other pollutants in fish, you probably second-guess yourself about which kinds are safe to serve—and then there's the matter of getting the kids to deviate from their usual chicken nuggets. Still, it's shocking that in 2006, 15 percent of 2- to 9-year-olds didn't eat any seafood all year long—not a single shrimp or bite of fish stick. "Parents don't realize how wide-ranging the health benefits of fish are," says William Harris, Ph.D., professor of medicine at the Sanford School of Medicine, University of South Dakota in Sioux Falls. "Some studies report that kids who eat fish have fewer behavior problems and a slightly higher IQ."

To help kids reel in all the goodness, *Parents* asked experts to get to the bottom of the crucial safety issues and environmental concerns. Then we turned to chefs at famous seafood restaurants for recipes that will make a splash with your little minnows.

### Why Fish?

Many of the health benefits of seafood come from its omega-3 fatty acids, a type of polyunsaturated fat that was more common in the diets of past generations. The two most important omega-3s, docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), are only found naturally in fish and fish oils. (They're added to most infant formulas and some other foods.) Canola oil, flaxseed, walnuts, soybeans, and a few other edibles contain alpha lipoic acid, a type of omega-3 that the body can make into DHA or EPA. "Your child would have to eat massive quantities of these foods to get the same amount that's in a couple of ounces of salmon," explains Dr. Harris. "Supplements are an option, but due to the other nutrients in fish, it's best to go to the source."



## Shrimp Pizza

"Some parents order this pie as an appetizer and are blown away when their child eats a piece," says Richard Vellante, executive chef for Legal Sea Foods, an East Coast chain.

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| <p><b>1 14-oz. can refrigerated pizza crust, such as Pillsbury</b></p> <p><b>2 Tbs. olive oil, divided</b></p> <p><b>2 tsp. minced garlic</b></p> <p><b>1 lb. shrimp, peeled</b></p> | <p><b>5 plum tomatoes, cut into ¼" slices</b></p> <p><b>¼ cup fresh basil, slivered</b></p> <p><b>1 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese</b></p> <p><b>Pepper to taste</b></p> |
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- 1** Preheat oven to 425°F. Roll out crust to fit a jelly-roll pan. (If you don't have one, make it 15"×10" on a cookie sheet.) Brush crust with 1 Tbs. olive oil and sprinkle with garlic. Top with shrimp and tomatoes; bake for 12 minutes.
- 2** Remove the pizza from the oven. Sprinkle it with basil and cheese. Drizzle with the remaining oil. Return to the oven just until cheese is melted, about 7 minutes. Season with pepper and allow the pizza to cool slightly before serving. Cut into 12 rectangular slices.

**Nutrition per slice** 175 calories; 13g protein; 6g fat (1g sat. fat); 18g carbs; 1g fiber; 99mg calcium; 2mg iron; 298mg sodium.

### BAIT

Let your kids roll out the dough and put on the toppings. They're more likely to eat what they helped to make.

half," says Melinda Johnson, R.D., a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. And that has some scientists concerned. "Getting a low amount of omega-3 fatty acids has as much of a detrimental effect on the brain as being exposed to lead," says William Lassek, Ph.D., assistant professor of epidemiology at the University of Pittsburgh. In a soon-to-be-published study of kids ages 6 to 16, Dr. Lassek found that those with the highest intake of omega-3s

scored the best on cognitive tests. "Omega-3s help the nerves process information better and faster," he says.

These fatty acids also play a role in a child's immune system. A pair of Swedish studies found that babies who started eating fish before age 1 (it's fine to introduce it when little ones are 4 to 6 months old, according to the American Academy

The Institute of Medicine recommends that 1- to 3-year-olds get 70 milligrams (mg) of DHA and EPA total daily, while 4- to 8-year-olds should have 90mg worth—just an ounce of most kinds of seafood more than takes care of that. "Even though many experts consider the recommendation to be lowball, kids on average are missing it by about

of Pediatrics) had a lower chance of developing the skin condition eczema by their first birthday and food and airborne allergies in the toddler years.

Kids with behavior problems also stand to benefit. In a study at the University of Oxford, in England, researchers gave 5- to 12-year-olds with developmental disorders 732 milligrams worth of omega-3 supplements daily, a safe amount if monitored by a doctor. After three months, 40 percent of the kids with symptoms of ADHD showed such great improvement in behavior that they no longer met the criteria of the condition.

Beyond omega-3s, fish has nutrients that are hard to find in a kid's diet. "Many kinds of fish are a great source of riboflavin, zinc, phosphorus, iodine, magnesium, and vitamins D and E," says Johnson.

### Safest Seafood

Serving your children fish would be a no-brainer if it weren't for pollution. All seafood contains at least a tiny bit of

mercury, a toxic metal that interferes with the nervous system of fetuses and young children. Although a small amount occurs naturally, most of it is released into the air and water when coal, wood, or oil are burned. Some fish is also polluted by PCBs, cancer-causing man-made chemicals that have been improperly disposed of or released into the environment. Figuring out what's safe for your family to eat can seem complicated, but our experts boiled it down to these three rules.

**1. Avoid some fish.** King mackerel, swordfish, shark, and tilefish are no-gos for women of childbearing age and children because of the high level of mercury, says John Senn, a spokesperson for the Environmental Protection Agency. Their mercury concentrations range from .7 to 1.45 parts per million—far higher than other seafood. Tilapia, for instance, has 70 times less. While the federal government hasn't issued any advice on fish to avoid because of high PCB levels, Timothy Fitzgerald, a marine scientist at

## Go Fish!

Tuck this safest-seafood list in your wallet so you can refer to it at the supermarket.

### Catch a Keeper

(Low in mercury and PCBs; not overfished)

- Anchovies\*
- Catfish (farmed)
- Clams
- Cod (Pacific)
- Crab (U.S.)
- Crawfish (U.S.)
- Flounder (Pacific)
- Mackerel\* (Atlantic, U.S.)
- Oysters\*
- Pollack (Alaskan)
- Rainbow trout\* (U.S. farmed)
- Salmon (wild Alaskan)\*\*
- Scallops
- Shrimp (U.S.)
- Tilapia (U.S.)

### Proceed With Caution

(Moderate in mercury and/or PCBs)

- Halibut (Pacific)\*
- Mahi Mahi
- Sablefish\*
- Tuna\*\*\*

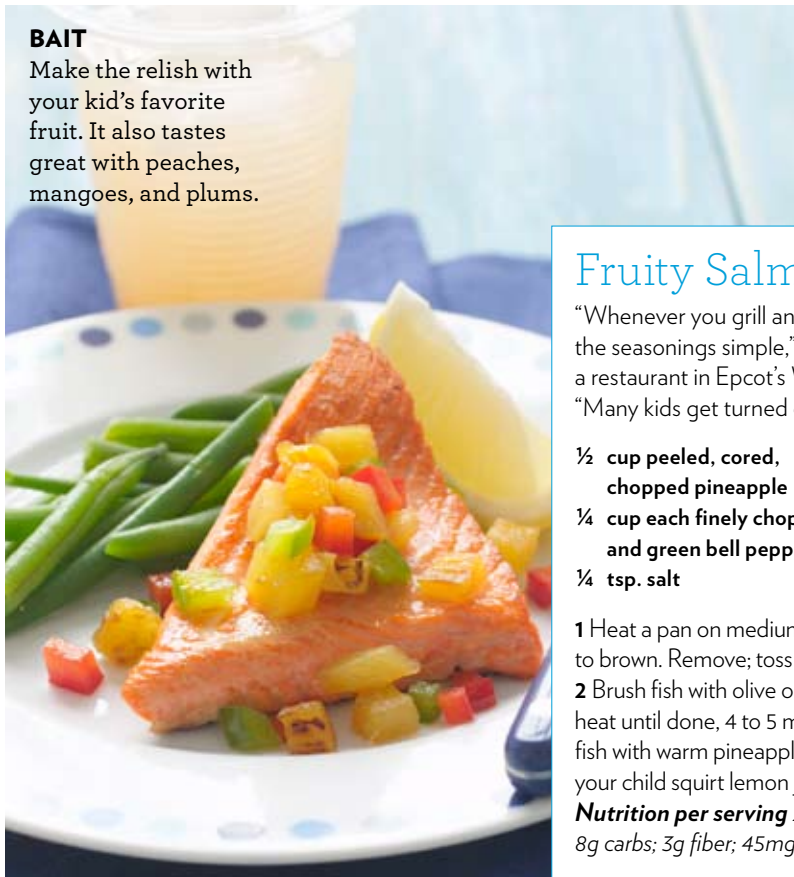
\* Especially rich in omega-3s

\*\* Most canned salmon is wild

\*\*\* Canned light tuna, which is generally made with skipjack, has less mercury than white albacore tuna.

### BAIT

Make the relish with your kid's favorite fruit. It also tastes great with peaches, mangoes, and plums.



## Fruity Salmon

"Whenever you grill any kind of fish for kids, the key is to keep the seasonings simple," says Marco Chaves, chef at Coral Reef, a restaurant in Epcot's Walt Disney World Resort, in Orlando. "Many kids get turned off by strong or spicy flavors."

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| ½ cup peeled, cored, chopped pineapple              | 1 lb. boneless, skinless wild salmon filet, cut into 8 pieces |
| ¼ cup each finely chopped red and green bell pepper | 1 Tbs. olive oil  |
| ¼ tsp. salt   | 2 cups steamed green beans                                    |
|   | Lemon wedges  |

**1** Heat a pan on medium-high. Add pineapple; cook until it begins to brown. Remove; toss with peppers and salt. Keep warm.  
**2** Brush fish with olive oil and cook in a grill pan over medium-high heat until done, 4 to 5 minutes per side, turning once. To serve, top fish with warm pineapple relish and serve with green beans. Let your child squirt lemon juice on his fish. Serves 4.

**Nutrition per serving** 227 calories; 24g protein; 11g fat (2g sat. fat); 8g carbs; 3g fiber; 45mg calcium; 1mg iron; 198mg sodium.



**BAIT**  
 Serve fish sticks with tartar sauce, ketchup, cocktail sauce, or any kind of dip you think your kid will eat.

## Crunchy Fish Sticks

The coating in this recipe, inspired by Ray's Boathouse, in Seattle, makes it special. "Kids like its mellow flavor," says Peter Birk, executive chef.

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour**
- 1 Tbs. dry mustard**
- Salt and pepper to taste**
- 2 cups buttermilk**
- 2 eggs**
- 1 lb. tilapia or halibut, cut into 24 strips**
- 3 cups panko bread crumbs**
- ½ cup canola oil, divided**

**1** In a large bowl, mix flour, mustard, salt, and pepper; add buttermilk and eggs. Coat fish with the egg mixture, then bread crumbs. In a pan, heat some oil on medium high. Sauté fish in batches with more oil until done, about 5 minutes, turning occasionally. Makes 24.

**Nutrition per four sticks**

*395 calories; 27g protein; 10g fat (2g sat. fat); 48g carbs; 2g fiber; 126mg calcium; 3mg iron; 359mg sodium.*

the Environmental Defense Fund, says that shad, white croaker, and eel are too contaminated for anyone to eat them. If protecting the ecosystem is a priority for you, avoid Atlantic cod, farmed salmon, Atlantic flounder, skate, monkfish, and grouper.

**2. Take your pick.** See "Go Fish!" on page 72. Young kids can safely have two three-ounce fish meals per week from any of the choices listed in "Catch a Keeper." Plus, they can eat one three-ounce serving of fish from the "Proceed With Caution" list per month, says Nicolas Stettler, M.D., a pediatrician at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and a member of the Institute of Medicine's committee on balancing the risks and benefits of seafood. Adds Johnson: "It's best to mix things up. That way, if a fish becomes unexpectedly high in mercury or PCBs, your kids won't have eaten it again and again."

**3. Cook it right.** Although you can't do anything about mercury levels, you can lower PCB levels by removing the skin and fat of the fish before cooking. □