

Parent Guide for Buying Shrimp

Kids Love Shrimp and You Love Your Kids: A Guide to Help Protect Their Health and That of Our Planet When Buying Shrimp



Why Should Making Healthy Choices Be so Difficult?

Choosing seafood for your kids and family should be simple, especially if your kids tend to prefer a particular seafood such as shrimp. However, getting children to eat a well-rounded diet that includes foods that are good for them is challenging. Shrimp has been one of those foods that helps parents meet this challenge and it's available in most grocery stores—frozen or fresh—and many restaurants have it on their menus.

But buying shrimp can be complicated if parents are trying to make food choices that are both healthy for their children and sustainable for the future generations.

Unfortunately, no clear guidelines exist for making the best choice when trying to buy healthy and environmentally responsible shrimp products. This is why some families become exasperated and put their trust in retailers, hoping they have made a prudent choice in their seafood selections. But many retailers are not aware of all of the health and ecological issues associated with shrimp and therefore don't make their shrimp selections based on them.

Where Does Your Shrimp Come From

Farmed

About 43 percent of global shrimp production is farmed, the majority of which comes from developing countries in Asia and South America. Farming shrimp can involve the use of drugs, such as antibiotics, as well as other chemicals, such as fertilizers, pesticides and preservatives.

In some regions, the farms are already situated in polluted waters. Shrimp farming can also have environmental impacts such as pollution and destruction of key habitats along coasts such as coral reefs and mangroves, although the practice of clearing mangroves for shrimp ponds has decreased in many parts of the world.

Shrimp and freshwater prawns are also farmed in the United States, with more regulatory oversight than most other nations. In the United States and elsewhere, experimental farms are developing methods that have fewer impacts on the environment.

Wild Caught

Buying wild-caught shrimp is not the easy answer because it also has its downsides. Trawling, the most common fishing method used to catch shrimp, destroys more than 1.8 million tons of marine life each year, including sea turtles and favorite recreational fish species. For example, NOAA's FishWatch reports that shrimp caught by trawling in the Gulf of Mexico can make up as little as 16 percent of the catch. Trawling also destroys coral reefs and other ocean floor habitats as heavy nets are dragged along the sea floor. More ecologically friendly methods of catching shrimp are available, including the use of pots and traps (wire or wooden cages) that lie on the ocean floor and are tied to a buoy on the surface. While these methods also have some negative environmental consequences, they are minimal in contrast to trawling.

Additionally, wild-caught shrimp are not worry-free when it comes to your child's health because wild-caught shrimp are sometimes treated with preservatives just like farmed shrimp. Furthermore, no part of the ocean is free from contaminants so wild-caught shrimp are also exposed to pollutants in the ocean. Fortunately, most shrimp do not live long enough to accumulate high concentrations of pollutants such as mercury and PCBs.

8401 Colesville Road
Suite 500
Silver Spring, MD 20910

T: +1 301.495.9570
F: +1 301.495.4846

info@kidsafeseafood.org
www.kidsafeseafood.org