

LIFE IN FLAVOR

# Sushi Vs. Sashimi Vs. Nigiri Vs. Maki: What's The Difference?

by *Perry Carpenter* | October 16, 2018

Know what you are getting yourself into the next time you visit a Japanese restaurant.



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Going out for sushi can be a fun date or family outing, but when you take a look at a sushi menu, things can get confusing really fast.

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In addition to seeing sushi, you will likely see words like sashimi, nigiri, and maki, and many people aren't clear about the difference between all of these traditional Japanese fish dishes.

We will break down the basics for sushi, sashimi, nigiri, and maki. The next time you go to your favorite sushi restaurant, you will have all the information you need to order the exact Japanese fish dish you are looking for.

## What Is Sushi?



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Sushi is a prepared vinegared rice served with vegetables and fish. It is generally a nutritious and non-fattening food.

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It is high in protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals, while being naturally low in fat. If you add veggies to the dish, then there are even more vitamins and minerals, and the seafood adds omega-3 fatty acids which is beneficial for cardiovascular health and brain function.

However, there is sometimes mayo in a sushi dish, which can increase the calorie and fat content.

And, sushi can have a high sodium content because of the soy sauce seasoning.

Because of the popularity of sushi, it has transformed into many modern dishes with varying ingredients, preparation, and condiments.

There are also sashypes, including handmade sashimi, rolled sashimi, pressed sashimi, and scattered sashimi.

## Sashimi



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Many people think of sushi as simply being raw fish, but that is not the case. Sushi is a general term for a Japanese meal that consists of either fish, rice mixed with vinegar, or both.

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However, not all fish in sushi is raw. There are actually just a few fishes that you can serve raw.

Traditionally, sushi is made with medium grain white rice seasoned with salt, sugar, and vinegar, and often prepared with seafood like calamari, crab, and eel.

But, there are also vegetarian options. And, it is usually served with wasabi, pickled ginger, and soy sauce, and dressed in seaweed (nori).

A common misconception is that sushi is all about the fish, but that is wrong.

The word actually means "vinegar rice," and the rice is the key ingredient that makes a dish a sushi dish.

And, since it is a general word for anything that comes with vinegared rice, sushi comes in many different varieties.

But, it does not need to contain raw fish to be sushi.



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Sushi and sashimi are often confused because many people think of sushi as raw fish and sashimi is on the menu at many sushi restaurants.

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In reality, sashimi is actually a Japanese dish that is only thinly sliced raw fish or meat --- and it doesn't come with rice.

This means that sashimi is not sushi because there is never any vinegared rice involved.

In addition to being raw fish (served with pickled ginger and wasabi), sashimi can also be raw meat, raw veggies, or raw tofu.

The literal translation is "pierced body/meat." However, the most popular types of sashimi include salmon, tuna, horse mackerel, octopus, scallop, and sea urchin.

Usually, chefs use salt water fish for sashimi because freshwater fish often have parasites that can cause intestinal distress.



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Pure sashimi is raw fish, meat, or veggies served on its own. It is sometimes used in sushi rolls, but then it is no longer pure sashimi.

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Just because sashimi is a simple presentation of sliced fish without any other ingredients, it doesn't mean chefs don't take great care in preparing it.

They will select the best fish for the dish, and how they slice it or garnish it brings out different flavors.

Since it is served raw, pregnant women should avoid sashimi altogether.

However, it is generally a healthy dish that contains vitamins and minerals, depending on the type of meat you use.

## Sushi Vs. Sashimi





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To recap, sushi is vinegared rice and sashimi is thin slices of raw fish, meat, or veggies. A sushi dish can have more than just the rice, but it is the vinegared rice that is the common thread in all sushi dishes.

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On the other hand, sashimi is just the meat, which means it is not sushi.

### **Nutrition**

When it comes to nutrition, the amount of calories, carbs, fat, protein, and fiber varies in sashimi and sushi because there are so many varieties of ingredients you can use.

Sushi tends to have more carbs and calories because of the rice, and there are often ingredients like mayonnaise in sushi that will boost the fat and calorie count.

But, for the sashimi, it is just the meat, which means high amounts of protein and low calorie and carb counts.

### **Health Benefits and Risks**

Both dishes often use fish, and that makes both sushi and sashimi high in omega-3 fatty acids, which offer big health benefits like fighting depression and anxiety, improved brain health, and fighting inflammation.

However, you want to be careful consuming large quantities of sushi or sashimi because of the mercury and other heavy metal contaminants.

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Anyone with a compromised immune system should avoid raw fish.

### **How They Are Served**

Both sushi and sashimi are popular Japanese dishes usually served with wasabi, pickled ginger, and soy sauce.

However, they are very different and not interchangeable. Sashimi is not sushi, but sushi can contain sashimi...and that results in a dish called nigiri.

## **Nigiri**





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Nigiri is a combination of sushi and sashimi. It is a dish of raw slices of fish (sashimi) served over oblong mounds of pressed vinegar rice (sushi).

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Because it includes the vinegar rice, nigiri is a type of sushi. Nigiri is always a variety of seafood, like fish, octopus, shrimp, or squid --- but never meat.

The majority of the time, nigiri is raw fish, but there are certain types of nigiri that can be cooked or seared.

For some people, nigiri is the visual they think of when they think of sushi because it is a combination of raw fish and vinegared rice.

It is often served on wooden trays with pickled ginger, wasabi, and soy sauce.

Popular fish toppings in nigiri are tuna, salmon, halibut, yellowtail, octopus, and squid.

Most sushi first-timers find salmon nigiri to be the best option for their first sushi experience, thanks to its palatable and unique taste.

## Maki



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Maki could also be what some people think of when they think of sushi because it is layers of fish, veggies, and sushi rice that is rolled up in a sheet of seaweed.

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Chances are, if you have eaten a traditional sushi roll, you have eaten maki.

There are different variations of maki, including **temaki** which is similar to maki, but uses less seaweed and the chef forms it by hand and gives it a cone-shape, often calling it a hand roll.

There is also **tekamaki**, which looks similar to a regular maki roll, but has just a single ingredient plus rice.

Some examples of **tekamaki** are tuna rolls, salmon rolls, and cucumber rolls.

**Futomaki** are fatter rolls with multiple ingredients in the center, an example being a California roll.

So, is maki sushi?

Yes. But not all sushi is maki.

## Maki Vs Nigiri



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Two of the most common types of sushi --- especially for beginners --- are maki and nigiri. Maki is layers of fish, veggies, and rice wrapped in seaweed, while nigiri features layers of raw fish on top of rice --- no seaweed.

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