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Why Seafood Spoils

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Spoilage begins as soon as seafood species die. Their normal defense mechanisms stop working and a series of changes begin that cause spoilage. These changes are caused by bacteria, enzymes and chemical action.

Spoilage By Bacteria

Bacteria are the most important cause of seafood spoilage. Millions of bacteria are present in the surface slime, on the gills, and in the gut of living seafood species. When seafood species die, bacteria, or the enzymes they produce, invade the flesh through the gills, along blood vessels, and directly through the skin and belly cavity lining. In the flesh, bacteria grow and multiply, producing compounds which are responsible for "fishy" odors and flavors, and discolorations associated with stale seafood. If food poisoning bacteria are present, they can multiply and cause illness when the seafood is eaten.

Spoilage By Enzymes

Many different enzymes are present in living seafood species. They help build tissue, contract and relax muscles, and digest food. When seafood species die, enzymes continue to work and start to digest or breakdown the flesh. This causes the flesh to soften and lowers the quality. Enzymes also produce more food for bacteria to feed on, increasing the rate of spoilage.

Spoilage By Chemical Action

Oxygen in the air can attack unsaturated oils in seafood causing rancidity, off-odors and off-flavors. This is especially important in fatty fish such as salmon and mackerel.

Slowing Seafood Spoilage

All of the changes that cause seafood spoilage are affected by temperature. High temperatures speed spoilage and low temperatures slow spoilage. For many seafood species, increasing the temperature from 32°F to 40°F doubles the rate of spoilage and cuts the shelf life in half.

Sanitation is also important. Contamination of seafood by bacteria from dirty ice, containers and surfaces can increase the number of bacteria on seafood and speed spoilage. Contamination with food poisoning bacteria can cause illness when the seafood is eaten. Keeping seafood handling and storage equipment clean reduces bacterial contamination and slows spoilage.

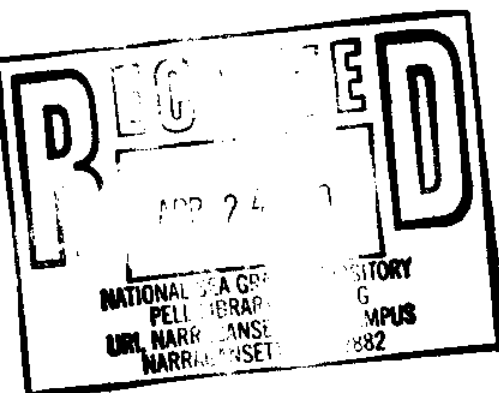
Shelf Life

The approximate shelf life for fresh fish fillets is:

| <u>High Quality Shelf Life</u> | <u>Edible Shelf Life</u> | <u>Holding Temperature (°F)</u> |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 14 hours | 1 day | 90 |
| 1½ days | 2½ days | 60 |
| 3½ days | 6 days | 42 |
| 8½ days | 14 days | 32 |
| 10½ days | 17½ days | 30 |
| 12 days | 20 days | 29 |

Effect of Temperature on Shelf Life

| Time at Holding Temperature | Holding Temperature (°F) | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | 29 | 30 | 32 | 34 | 36 | 38 | 40 | 45 | 50 | 55 | 60 | 65 |
| Equivalent Age of Product in Days at 32°F | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 hours | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.7 |
| 4 hours | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.5 | 0.7 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 1.3 |
| 6 hours | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.7 | 1.0 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 2.0 |
| 12 hours | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 1.5 | 2.0 | 2.6 | 3.3 | 4.0 |
| 18 hours | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.8 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 2.2 | 3.0 | 3.9 | 4.9 | 6.0 |
| 1 day | 0.7 | 0.8 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 1.8 | 2.1 | 3.0 | 4.0 | 5.2 | 6.5 | 8.0 |
| 2 days | 1.4 | 1.6 | 2.0 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 3.6 | 4.2 | 5.9 | | | | |
| 3 days | 2.1 | 2.4 | 3.0 | 3.7 | 4.5 | 5.3 | 6.3 | | | | | |
| 4 days | 2.8 | 3.2 | 4.0 | 4.9 | 7.1 | 8.4 | | | | | | |
| 5 days | 3.5 | 4.0 | 5.0 | 6.2 | | | | | | | | |
| 6 days | 4.1 | 4.7 | 6.0 | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 days | 4.8 | 5.5 | 7.0 | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 days | 5.5 | 6.3 | 8.0 | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 days | 6.2 | 7.1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 days | 6.9 | 7.9 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 days | 7.6 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 days | 8.3 | | | | | | | | | | | |



| Example | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| | Actual Elapsed Time | Holding Temp. | Equivalent Age at 32°F |
| Fish caught | 2 hours | 60°F | 0.5 days |
| Storage on vessel | 3 days | 34°F | 3.7 days |
| Processing | 12 hours | 45°F | 1.5 days |
| Distribution | 12 hours | 36°F | 0.7 days |
| Retail Case | 1 day | 38°F | 1.8 days |
| TOTAL | 5.1 days | | 8.2 days |
| Remaining high quality shelf life | | 32°F | 0.2 days |
| Remaining edible shelf life | | 32°F | 5.6 days |
| | | 40°F | 2.7 days |

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The author is Robert J. Price, Seafood Technology Specialist
Department of Food Science & Technology, University of California, Davis, California 95616

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