

#FOOD & RECIPES

# Why seafood deserves a place on our PLATES, HEART, BODY AND MIND

As Bangladeshis, we have always had fish from the sea in our diet. With time, once considered a coastal luxury, fish like hilsa, rupchanda, koral, and even imported varieties such as basa, are now easily available. This rise in accessibility has opened new possibilities for healthier eating — something that nutritionists have long encouraged.

One of the biggest advantages of seafood is its rich omega-3 fatty acid content, which helps increase HDL — the “good” cholesterol — while lowering triglycerides. This combination plays a vital role in keeping the heart healthy and reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

According to Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin, Chief Clinical Nutritionist at United Hospital Limited, omega-3 from saltwater fish is especially valuable for people already vulnerable to heart problems, as it helps maintain overall heart function. Hasin also highlights that the benefits of seafood go well beyond heart health. Regularly eating fish such as hilsa, koral, and rupchanda can boost memory and brain performance by supporting the structure of brain cells.

“Seafood supports cognitive capacity and even helps slow down the aging process,” she says. “It nourishes the brain while protecting against age-related deterioration.”

Another benefit often overlooked is its impact on vision. The same omega-3 fatty acids that benefit the heart and brain also help protect eye health, reducing the risk of dry eyes and age-related vision problems. For many people who spend long hours in front of screens, seafood offers a natural way to strengthen and maintain eye function.

“Saltwater fish is particularly good for weight management,” notes Hasin. “It keeps you satisfied longer without the heaviness that comes from fried or red meat dishes.” Since these fishes are high in protein but relatively low in calories and saturated fats, it makes them filling yet light — ideal for balanced diets.

However, Hasin cautions against the way seafood is often prepared. Most of the time, we tend to deep fry them, which ends up destroying

much of the omega-3 content and adding unhealthy fats that cancel out its benefits. Instead, she recommends baking, grilling, or steaming to preserve the nutrients while maintaining flavour.

Seaweed and spirulina, not found in our diet commonly, are rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals — especially iodine, which supports thyroid function. Spirulina, a type of blue-green algae, is praised for its high protein content and anti-inflammatory properties. However, it should be consumed cautiously, particularly for those with kidney issues.



Incorporating seaweed in small amounts — whether as dried flakes, in soups, or as part of salads — can help diversify nutrient intake without adding excess calories. For vegetarians or those who eat less fish, seaweed can offer some of the same benefits, especially when it comes to minerals and antioxidants.

While seafood offers numerous benefits, it also comes with certain risks if not chosen or prepared carefully. One of the most discussed concerns is mercury contamination. Some large saltwater fish tend to accumulate higher levels of mercury, which can be harmful — especially for pregnant women and young children. “It’s a controversial topic,” Hasin admits. “Saltwater fish is nutritious, but due to the mercury content, it’s not suitable

for pregnant mothers or babies. Exposure at that stage may lead to hyperactivity or developmental issues.”

Another major concern in Bangladesh is seafood contamination. Given the country’s warm climate and often unhygienic handling practices, consuming raw or undercooked seafood can be extremely risky. Cooking fish properly eliminates harmful bacteria and parasites that may otherwise cause severe illness.

Allergies are another issue to consider. Shellfish and certain fish can trigger allergic reactions ranging from mild skin irritation to serious respiratory distress. Hasin advises, “If you’re trying seafood for the first time, start with small amounts to make sure you’re not allergic.”

People with heart disease should also be mindful of sodium levels, especially in processed seafood like dried fish or canned options. These products tend to be high in salt, which can raise blood pressure.

Overeating seafood can also lead to digestive problems, particularly if it’s fried or prepared in heavy sauces.

Moderation, as always, remains key.

Seafood can be one of the healthiest additions to a balanced diet when eaten in right portion and prepared correctly. Opting for local options such as hilsa, rupchanda and koral ensures freshness and lower mercury level, while lighter cooking methods help preserve the nutrients that make seafood so valuable.

As Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin sums up, “Saltwater fish is more available now than before, and that’s a good thing. But we need to eat it wisely — choose the right fish, cook it properly, and be mindful of how much we eat.”

**By Nusrath Jahan**  
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