

# HOW TO TELL IF FISH IS FRESH



Sense is very important when buying fish and we're not just talking about common sense; sight, smell and touch all come into it.

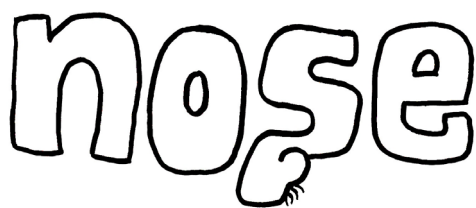
While some meat can actually benefit by quite literally hanging around for a few days or even weeks (see *Shopping for beef*), fish is another story. Freshness is everything because when fish has just been caught it has a fabulous delicate flavour and juicy texture. When it becomes old, it can be strong-tasting, smelly and dried out, which is not good.

As a general rule, Mondays are not a great day to buy fish because fishing boats don't go out on Sundays. That means the fish being sold on a Monday was probably caught on Friday or, at the latest, Saturday, so might not be at its freshest. The exception to this is farmed trout and salmon, which can be caught any day of the week.

If you know what to look for, your eyes, nose and fingertips will tell you what's been freshly caught and also what's been hanging around for a couple of days.

## USE YOUR EYES

- Fresh fish has shiny almost slimy skin like it's just come out of the water.
- Scaly fish like salmon, sardines or red mullet should have all their scales intact not half rubbed off.
- Fish should have bright clear eyes, not cloudy or glazed over, and healthy red gills.
- Fillets of fish should be shiny and look wet. The flesh should not be flaking apart.
- Look at the display of fish. If they're neatly laid out on the ice it shows that the fishmonger cares about what he's selling. If they're carelessly thrown in a pile so the fillets are bent and flaking apart, be wary. Just imagine what the fridge in the back must look like!



## USE YOUR NOSE

- Fresh fish never ever smells fishy. It smells of the sea.
- Don't be afraid to get close to the fish and take a good sniff. Trust what your nose tells you.
- Strong fishy smells in a fishmonger's are a bad sign, and if you smell anything like ammonia, it's time to turn around and walk out the door!

## USE YOUR HANDS

- Reach out and touch the fish if you can. It should be slippery and wet like it's just come out of the sea.
- Press it lightly. It should be firm and slightly rubbery to the touch.
- Fish that has hard, dry skin or is squishy and soft to the touch is fit for the bin, not your frying pan!



Trust your senses, they won't lie to you. You just need to learn to interpret and understand what they're telling you and have a bit of confidence. If you don't feel you can do any of this because the fish is behind a counter, don't be afraid to ask your fishmonger to let you see the fish up close. Remember, if their goods are up to scratch they should have nothing to hide.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BUYING SUSTAINABLE FISH

There's a lot of information around suggesting we should be buying fish from sustainable sources. If a fish or shellfish comes from a 'sustainable source', that means it has been caught in an area of the sea where the amount of fishing taking place isn't causing the population of fish to deplete, and by a fishery whose fishing does not cause too much damage to the surrounding environment or other wildlife.

Jamie says: *"I'm right in the game, listening to fishermen and talking to suppliers and when I say sustainability feels like a moving target it's because the fish are, literally, moving all the time."*

What Jamie means is that while a type of fish may be endangered in one part of the world, it could be thriving and therefore 'sustainable' 2,000 miles away. One way to try and keep on top of this is to use the Marine Stewardship Council's logo (MSC) as a guide. When you see their logo on a pack of fish, you can be assured that it comes from a sustainable source. The MSC is a small organisation that independently certifies fisheries based on how well-managed or sustainable their sources are.

They are working their way around fisheries all over the world, working out what is and isn't endangered. Because they are a small organisation, they haven't made it to all of the fisheries yet. So if a pack of fish doesn't have their logo, it doesn't necessarily mean it's not sustainable; it could mean the MSC hasn't evaluated that particular fishery.

Like Jamie says, it's a moving target. The best thing you can do is buy MSC-certified fish when you see it, and encourage shops to stock it and other people to buy it.

To find out more about sustainability, visit: [www.msc.org](http://www.msc.org)

