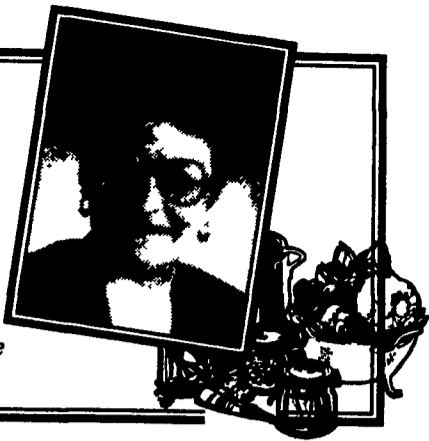


**Consuming Thoughts**  
by  
**Fay Strickler**

*Penn State Extension Home Economist For Berks Co.*



under the rest of the fillet. The fillet then has a more even thickness, ensuring uniform cooking. As you approach the time specified by the 10-minute rule, check the product to be sure you aren't overcooking. Seafood loses its natural translucent appearance, turns opaque, and flakes easily to the touch of a fork when done.

The 10-minute rule works especially well for baking or broiling. When broiling, keep the fish three to four inches from the heat source; thicker pieces, five to six inches away. When baking, always preheat the oven first so that you can estimate the cooking time more accurately.

You can adapt the 10-minute rule to poaching, boiling and steaming seafood—just begin the timing after the water returns to a boil. The rule cannot be applied to deep frying and microwaving, which cook fish faster. If you're cooking fish in foil, in sauce, with vegetables or other added ingredients, add about five minutes to the cooking time specified by the 10-minute rule.

Understand that this rule for cooking seafood is a simple guideline that you can adjust to your personal taste. Using the rule, your product should reach a temperature between 145-160 degrees F. Check the fillet or steak with a food thermometer if safety is a concern.

You can cook shellfish by poaching, steaming, boiling, sauteing, stir-frying, deep frying, baking, broiling or grilling. Because most shellfish are smaller and more delicate than finfish and usually cook faster, the 10 minute rule isn't appropriate.

For live clams, oysters and mussels, current Food and Drug Administration recommendations suggest boiling for three to five minutes after the shells have opened, or steaming for four to nine minutes. Boil shucked meats for three minutes, or bake for 10 minutes at 450 degrees F, or fry them in oil for 10 minutes at 375 degrees F.

Scallops and shrimp cook rapidly; how much time it will take depends on the size, product form, cooking method and the amount being cooked. As a rule poaching, steaming and sauteing take slightly less time than baking and broiling.

Seafood, naturally low in fat, can make a positive contribution to a healthy diet. To evaluate the healthfulness of a seafood recipe, check to see if the recipe:

- suggests cooking with oil or other fats;
- calls for a sauce that contains ingredients high in fat, such as cream, butter, mayonnaise or cheese; or
- calls for the addition of salt or seasonings high in salt.

If the recipe requires any of the above, consider modifying it by identifying the high-fat and high-sodium ingredients and substituting lower-fat and lower-sodium alternatives.

During Lenten season, you'll find supermarkets featuring a variety of seafood specials. Finfish and shellfish are quick, easy and safe to prepare if you follow a few simple guidelines. Almost any cooking method is appropriate, but because there are so many different products and cooking methods available, many people still lack confidence in their ability to cook seafood.

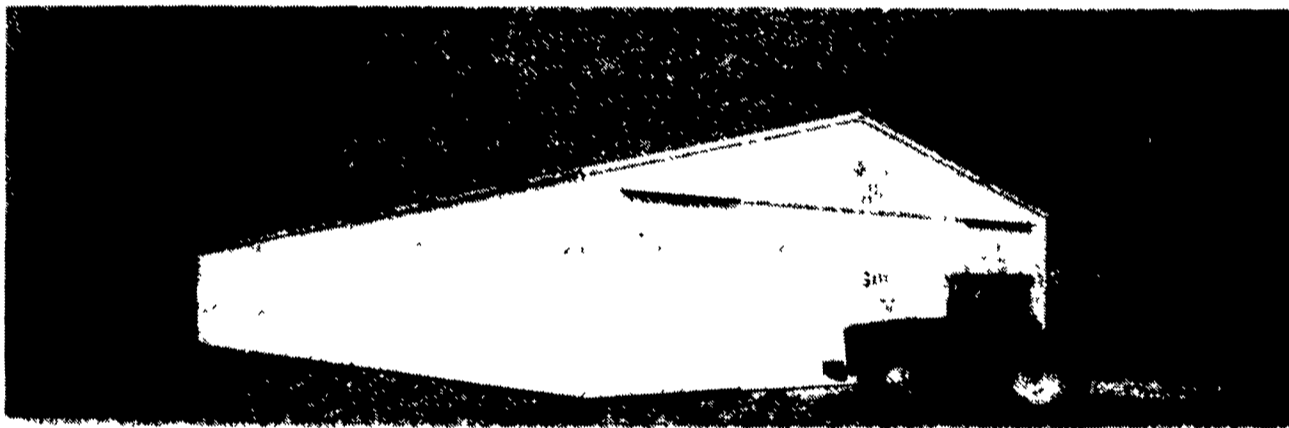
It's truly a "fast food" when it comes to preparation. Unlike meat, seafood doesn't need to be tenderized by cooking, and cook-

ing time for most products is from 10 to 20 minutes.

The simplest way to cook fresh (unfrozen) fish fillets and steaks is to use the "10-minute rule," which suggests you cook fish for 10 minutes per inch of thickness at 425-450 degrees Fahrenheit (F). Measure the thickest portion of the product to be cooked, and adjust the cooking time accordingly. For example, if the thickest part of a fillet is about one-half inch, cook it for five minutes.

Since most fillets are thinner at one end, fold the thinner part

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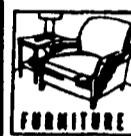
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