

The 10 Healthiest Fish to Eat, From Great to Best

Rankings can be a little gimmicky when it comes to nutrition, but they also serve a real purpose: they force a clear, side-by-side comparison instead of a vague list of "good options." If you have ever wanted a straightforward countdown of the [Healthiest Fish to Eat](#), scored against the same criteria rather than praised in isolation, this is that list.



Each entry below was evaluated on four factors: omega-3 content, protein density, mercury level, and overall accessibility, meaning how easy and affordable the fish is to find at a typical grocery store. Species that score well across all four categories rank higher than those that only dominate in one area. By the end of this countdown, you will have a clear, practical answer to what counts as the Healthiest Fish to Eat for Better Nutrition, along with the reasoning behind each placement.

How We're Scoring This List

Before jumping into the rankings, it helps to understand the four criteria driving each placement.

Omega-3 content measures how much EPA and DHA a typical serving provides, since these fats are tied to heart and brain health benefits that few other nutrients replicate.

Protein density looks at how much high-quality protein you get relative to calories, which matters for anyone managing weight or building muscle.

Mercury level accounts for how much of this heavy metal tends to accumulate in a species, based on its size, lifespan, and position in the food chain.

Accessibility considers price, availability at typical grocery stores, and how easy the fish is to prepare, since even a perfect nutrition profile does not help if nobody actually cooks it.

These four factors were chosen deliberately because they reflect the questions real shoppers actually ask themselves in the seafood aisle, rather than abstract lab metrics that rarely translate into what ends up on a dinner plate. A fish that scores brilliantly on paper but never gets purchased or cooked is not truly the Best Fish for Health and Wellness in any practical sense, which is why accessibility carries just as much weight in this countdown as the more obvious nutrient categories.

10. Halibut

Halibut opens the list because of its meaty texture and solid, if unspectacular, nutritional profile. It offers a good amount of lean protein and moderate omega-3s, but its higher mercury level compared to smaller fish, along with a steeper price tag, keeps it out of the weekly rotation for most people. It is a fine occasional choice rather than a daily staple, and it tends to work best as a special-occasion dinner rather than a Tuesday-night default.

9. Trout

Rainbow trout climbs just above halibut thanks to a stronger omega-3 profile and a gentler price point, especially when farmed responsibly. It is often overlooked in favor of its more famous cousin, salmon, but nutritionally it holds its own and deserves more attention than it typically gets. Because farmed trout is frequently raised in cleaner, more tightly regulated environments than some other farmed species, it also tends to carry a favorable contaminant profile alongside its solid nutrient numbers.

8. Herring

Herring is a small, oily fish loaded with omega-3s and vitamin D, and its low position on the food chain keeps mercury levels impressively low. It loses a few points on accessibility simply because it is less commonly stocked fresh in many grocery stores, though pickled and smoked versions are widely available and just as nutritionally valuable, making it easy to work into the diet once you know where to look.

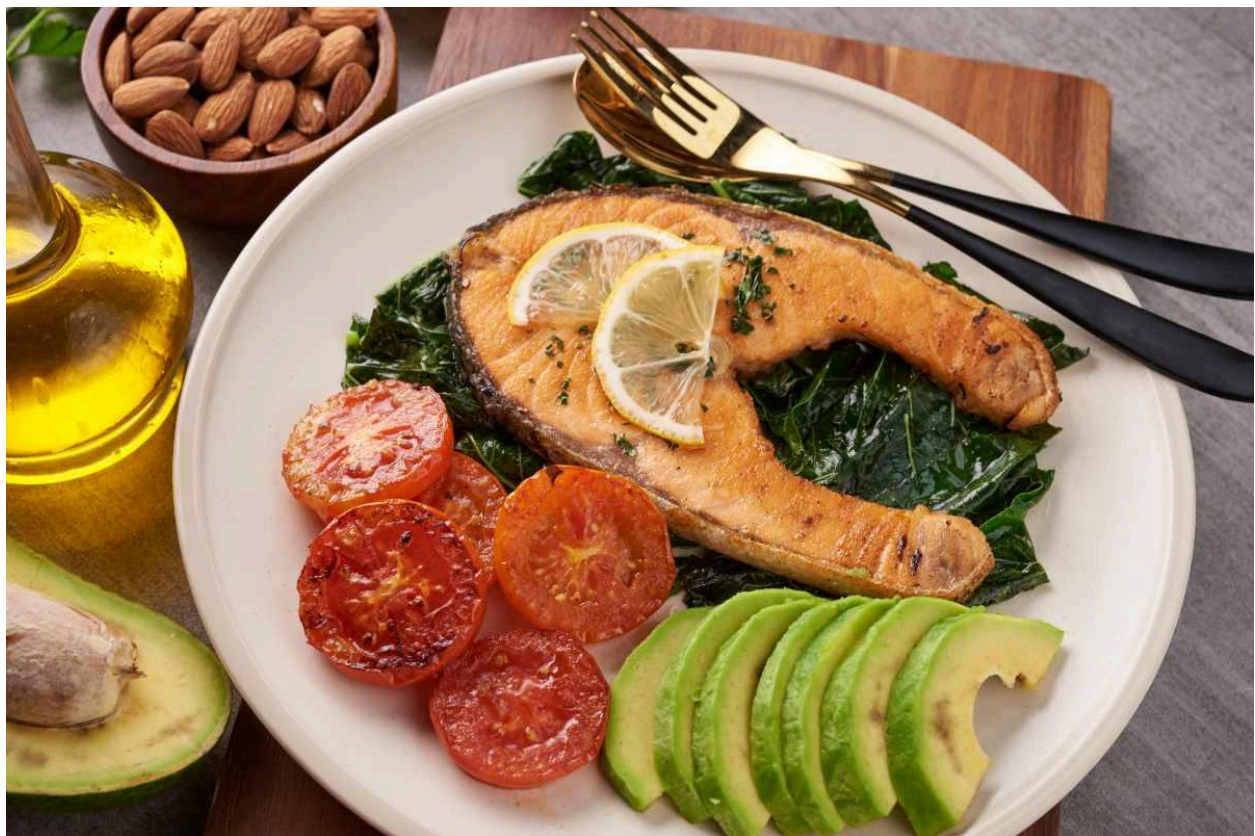
7. Shrimp

Shrimp is not technically a fish, but it earns a spot on most seafood nutrition lists because it is such a strong source of lean protein, selenium, and zinc, all for very few calories. It also happens to be one of the fastest seafood options to prepare, which boosts its accessibility score considerably, and its mild flavor makes it one of the easiest entry points for anyone still building confidence in the kitchen.

If shrimp is going on your menu, this [air-fried shrimp recipe](#) delivers a crispy result in well under 30 minutes with almost no cleanup afterward.

6. Tilapia

Tilapia lands solidly in the middle of the pack, and its ranking might surprise people who assume fattier fish always win. What tilapia lacks in omega-3s, it makes up for with exceptional protein density, a mild flavor that works in countless recipes, and one of the lowest price points of any seafood option, making it one of the Best Healthy Fish to Eat for anyone on a budget or new to cooking seafood. Its consistent texture also makes it one of the most forgiving fish for beginners to cook without much risk of overcooking or undercooking.



Want the exact protein numbers before building tilapia into your meal plan? This breakdown of [protein in tilapia](#) covers everything you need to know.

If you would rather cook it whole for a more impressive presentation, this guide on [how to make whole tilapia](#) walks through the entire process.

5. Cod

Cod edges out tilapia by a narrow margin thanks to a slightly higher protein-to-calorie ratio and near-universal availability, both fresh and frozen. It is also remarkably forgiving to cook, which matters more than people often give it credit for when scoring real-world accessibility, and its flaky texture holds up well to nearly any seasoning profile you throw at it.

For an easy, low-mess way to prepare it, this [air-fried cod fillet](#) recipe produces a crisp exterior without deep-frying.

4. Salmon

Salmon lands firmly in the top five, and honestly, it could argue for a higher spot depending on your priorities. It delivers a strong combination of omega-3s, protein, and vitamin D, and it stays reasonably low in mercury for a fish of its size. Its slightly higher price point compared to tilapia or cod is the only real ding against it, though sales on frozen fillets can narrow that gap considerably.

This [honey-glazed salmon recipe](#) is a simple, well-balanced way to prepare it that lets the fish's natural richness come through.

3. Mackerel

Mackerel edges out salmon on raw omega-3 numbers, often providing even more EPA and DHA per serving. The catch, quite literally, is that this ranking applies specifically to Atlantic or Spanish mackerel rather than king mackerel, which carries significantly more mercury due to its larger size and longer lifespan. Choosing the right species within this family matters more than with almost any other fish on the list, so double-checking the label before you buy is genuinely worth the extra few seconds.

2. Sardines

Sardines come in just shy of the top spot, and for many nutrition experts, they would top the list outright. They are exceptionally rich in omega-3s, calcium, and vitamin D, all while carrying some of the lowest mercury levels of any seafood option thanks to their short lifespan and low position on the food chain. Their affordability and shelf-stable canned format make them nearly unbeatable on accessibility as well, firmly placing them among the Most Nutritious Fish to Eat available anywhere, and a single can often costs less than a cup of coffee.

1. The Winner Depends on Your Definition of "Best"

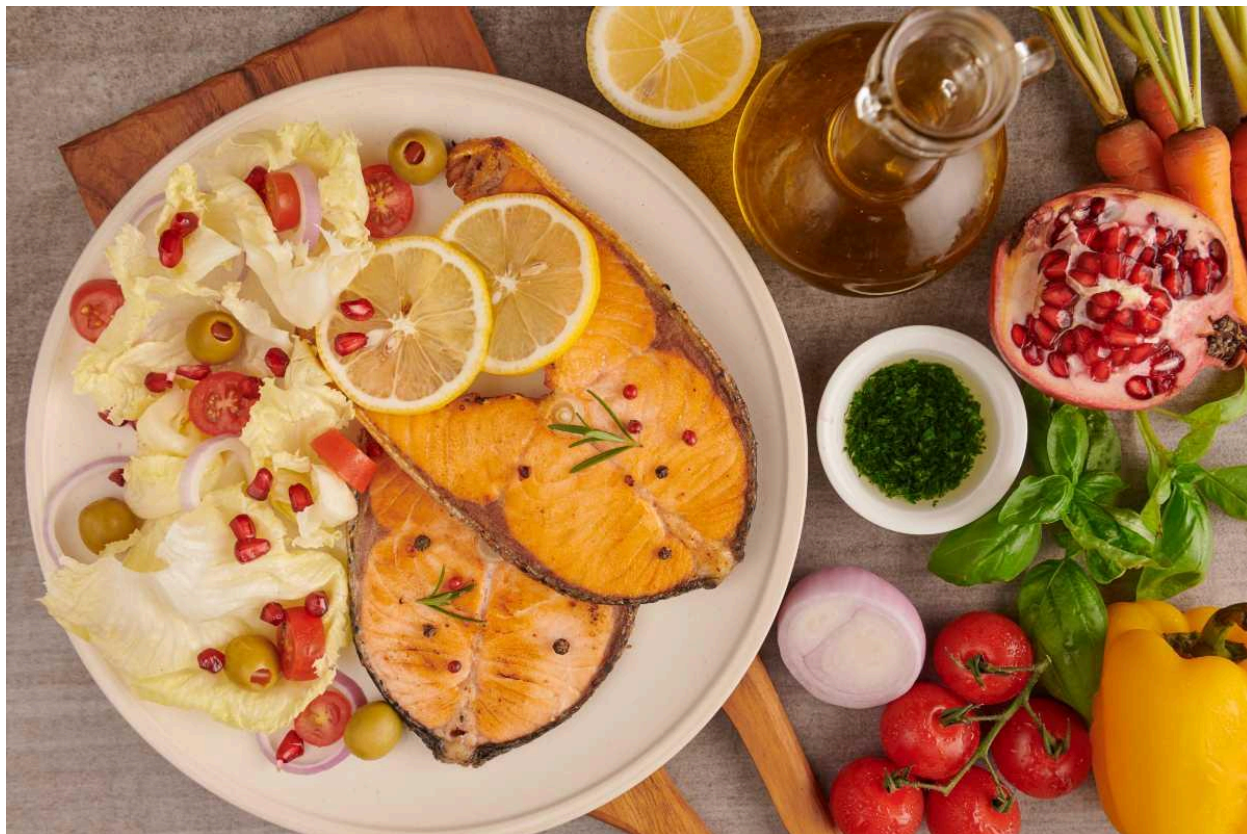
Here is the honest twist to this countdown: strict numerical scoring puts sardines and mackerel at the very top for pure nutrient density, but salmon consistently wins on versatility, taste appeal, and mainstream availability, which is exactly why it so often gets crowned the Healthiest Fish to Eat in casual conversation even when the raw numbers slightly favor smaller, oilier fish. Rather than forcing an artificial tie-breaker, the real takeaway is this: sardines, mackerel, and salmon are effectively tied at the top, and rotating between all three gives you the benefits of each without needing to pick a single champion.

Where Lean White Fish Fits Into the Bigger Picture

It is worth pausing to note that this ranking leans heavily toward omega-3 content, which naturally favors fatty fish. That does not mean lean white fish like cod and tilapia are inferior overall; it simply means they excel at a different job. If your primary goal is maximizing lean protein per calorie rather than omega-3 intake, the ranking would look noticeably different, with cod and tilapia climbing several spots. This is a good reminder that any single ranking reflects a specific set of priorities rather than an absolute truth, and understanding the Healthiest Fish for a Balanced Diet really means understanding which criteria matter most to you personally.

How Often Should This List Actually Influence Your Plate?

A ranking is only useful if it changes what ends up on your dinner table. The American Heart Association's general guidance of two fish servings a week remains a solid baseline regardless of where a species lands on this list. Building a rotation that includes at least one fatty fish from the top half of this ranking, alongside one lean option from the middle, tends to cover the most nutritional ground without requiring you to eat the exact same fish every time.



Treating this as your approach to eating the Healthiest Fish to Eat Every Week rather than chasing a single "best" species each time you shop tends to be far easier to stick with long term, and consistency is ultimately what drives real health outcomes.

Fish That Didn't Make the List (And Why)

A few commonly eaten species were deliberately left off this countdown, and it is worth explaining why, since an honest ranking should be just as clear about its exclusions as its inclusions.

King mackerel, swordfish, shark, and tilefish were excluded due to consistently high mercury levels that place them outside the "regularly eat this" category for most people, particularly pregnant women and young children. None of these are inherently bad fish, but they simply do not fit the everyday, low-risk profile this ranking is built around.

Farmed catfish was left off not because it is unhealthy, but because its nutritional profile falls solidly in the middle of the pack without standing out on any particular criteria, making it a fine but unremarkable choice compared to the fish featured above.

Bigeye and albacore tuna were excluded for similar mercury-related reasons, though skipjack tuna, which carries less mercury, could reasonably slot in around the middle of this list for

anyone who enjoys canned tuna as a pantry staple and wants a lower-risk alternative to the larger tuna species.

Building Your Own Personalized Ranking

If you want to build a version of this list tailored to your own priorities, start by deciding which single factor matters most to you: omega-3 content, protein density, budget, or mercury avoidance. Once you know your top priority, re-rank the fish above with that factor weighted most heavily, and you will likely land on a slightly different order that fits your life better than any generic countdown ever could. Someone training for endurance sports might weight protein and accessibility above everything else, while someone managing a family history of heart disease will naturally push omega-3-rich options like sardines and mackerel even further ahead. There is no single correct answer here, and understanding the trade-offs behind the Healthiest Fish to Eat is genuinely more useful than memorizing a fixed order.

For more weeknight inspiration beyond seafood, these [quick dinner ideas](#) can help round out a full week of meals without adding extra stress to your schedule.

The Bottom Line

Rankings are useful for comparison, but the real goal of understanding the [Healthiest Fish to Eat](#) is building a rotation rather than crowning a single winner. Sardines, mackerel, and salmon dominate the top of this list for omega-3 lovers, while cod and tilapia remain unbeatable for lean, affordable protein. The Top Healthy Fish Choices are really the ones you will actually buy, cook, and enjoy on a regular basis, regardless of exactly where they land on a numbered countdown.

Pick two or three fish from this list, put them into your grocery rotation this week, and let consistency do the rest. A ranking can point you in the right direction, but the habit of actually buying and cooking these fish week after week is what ultimately delivers the health benefits everyone is really after.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this ranking based on scientific data or personal opinion?

The criteria used—omega-3 content, protein density, mercury levels, and accessibility—are grounded in nutrition research. However, the final weighting and ordering reflect an interpretation of those factors rather than a single universally accepted scientific ranking.

Why did salmon not rank number one despite being so popular?

Sardines and mackerel can stand out for their nutrient density and relatively low mercury levels, while salmon remains an excellent source of omega-3s, protein, and other nutrients. Preferences can also vary based on taste, availability, price, and preparation.

Should I avoid every fish that did not make the top 10?

Not necessarily. Many fish that are not included in a particular top-10 list, such as skipjack tuna or catfish, can still be nutritious choices. A list reflects the specific criteria used rather than labeling every other fish as unhealthy.

How do I know if a fish I'm considering is high in mercury?

As a general rule, larger, longer-living predatory fish such as swordfish, shark, and king mackerel tend to contain more mercury. Smaller species such as sardines and herring generally contain less mercury.

Can this ranking change based on how the fish is farmed or caught?

Yes. Farming and harvesting methods can affect factors such as environmental impact, nutrient composition, and contaminant exposure. The origin and production method can therefore be relevant when comparing specific fish products.