Seafood

Seafood should constitute an important part of your diet because it is a good source of protein, Omega-3 fatty acids and iodine. There are three main issues that affect which fish we should choose: high mercury levels in fish, over-fishing and destruction of natural habitats and the issue of fish farming.

Mercury is an industrial waste released into oceans. When exposed to water, microorganisms convert mercury to methylmercury, which is very quickly absorbed. Mercury poisoning affects the brain and nervous system. The larger the fish, the more toxic chemicals it contains. So, shark, tuna and swordfish are really not great choices. The tuna in canned tuna comes from smaller fish so there is a lower concentration of mercury in those but there is still some mercury. It is best to limit the consumption of canned tuna to once a month.

Overfishing has become a serious problem. The natural population of many fish is in steep decline. 50% of fish stocks are fully exploited, 24% are overly exploited, and 21% are moderately exploited. For example, current fishing practices for cod and monkfish have seriously harmed their natural habitat.

Some fish, such as Arctic Char or Tilapia, may be sustainably farmed. However, farmed salmon and shrimp are often much like cattle in feedlots, they swim in pools of antibiotics, dyes, pesticides, chemicals and waste. In his book, Bottomfeeders: How to Eat Ethically in a World of Vanishing Seafood, Taras Grescoe writes about salmon,

"Salmon farms are offshore feedlots for converting brown pellets into edible, pink-hued flesh…The biggest question mark hovers over ingredient number one on the feed bags: crude protein. In the wild, salmon are top-of-the food chain predators, subsisting, at various times in their life cycle, on plankton, krill, squid and smaller fish. Industrial aquaculture, however has turned them into consumers of some of the nastier by-products of land animals. Salmon feed contains "poultry meal," an industrial product made from the intestines, undeveloped eggs, spray-dried blood, necks and feet of poultry – in the jargon of the trade, all the "nonfood parts" left over after processing. Normally indigestible feathers are hydrolyzed to make a dusty powder called feather meal; chicken manure – a potentially rich source of tapeworms, salmonella and arsenic – is also a key ingredient in salmon feed…Were it not for the artificial colorants, the flesh of farmed salmon would be an unappetizing gray, yellow, or khaki. In the wild, salmon owe their pink hue to krill and shrimp, which contain organic pigments … …Artificial colorants are only the start. When bacteria sickens salmon, farmers add antibiotics and other medications directly to their feed to control the outbreak."(Taras Grescoe, Bottomfeeders)

Moreover, the corn and soy fed to farmed salmon are often genetically modified. We can occasionally find "organic" salmon in supermarkets – this is usually farmed salmon fed a diet of organic corn and soy. The same farming principles apply to farmed shrimp, which usually comes from Thailand.

A good source of information on what seafood to buy is the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch list. Also, if you go to the supermarket, you often see the MSC seal. MSC stands for Marine Stewardship Council. A fish that is MSC-certified means that the fisheries have been certified for sustainability and the impact on the environment.

For more information, check out:
Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch List www.**montereybayaquarium**.org/cr/**seafoodwatch**.aspx
Taras Grescoe, Bottomfeeders: How to Eat Ethically in a World of Vanishing Seafood
Marion Nestle, What to Eat