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QUALITY ISSUES IN FROZEN FISH AND FISHERY PRODUCTS

K.A. Martin Xavier
Quality Assurance and Management Division
Email : martinxavierkochery@gmail.com

Fish that has been frozen will degrade depending on the pace of freezing, storage temperature, oxygen content, temperature swings, and stages of transport. Freezing is predicated on the development of larger, slower-growing ice crystals that denaturate proteins, breach cell membranes with fluid loss upon thawing, and produce low-quality products. A high-quality product is produced when the freezing process is completed fast because the smaller crystals minimise fluid losses during defrosting. However, temperature changes cause recrystallization, which lowers the product's quality and makes it comparable to a product that slowly freezes. As a result, deterioration at the food surface, chemical, and biological processes result in changes in colour, weight loss (caused by the formation of ice crystals), increased enzymatic activity, and fat oxidation. Freezing is a popular method for preserving seafood. It can extend the shelf life of seafood by several months or even years (up to 2 years). However, freezing does not prevent all quality changes from occurring. Frozen seafood is a popular and convenient way to enjoy seafood. However, it is important to be aware of the quality changes that can occur during frozen storage. Over time, frozen seafood can still lose moisture, develop off-flavors, and become tough. The rate of quality changes in frozen seafood depends on several factors, including the type of seafood, the freezing method, the storage temperature, and the packaging. These changes can affect the taste, texture, color, and nutritional value of the seafood. The rate of these quality changes will depend on several factors, including the type of seafood, the freezing method, the storage temperature, and the packaging.

- **Types of seafood**

Some types of seafood are more susceptible to quality changes during freezing than others. For example, shrimp and other shellfish are more likely to lose moisture and become tough than fish. This is because shrimp have a high water content and a delicate texture.

- **Freezing method and storage conditions of product**

The freezing method can also affect the quality of frozen seafood. Rapid freezing is generally better than slow freezing because it minimizes the formation of large ice crystals. Large ice crystals can damage the cell membranes of seafood, leading to loss of moisture and flavor. The storage temperature is also important for maintaining the quality of frozen seafood.

Seafood should be stored at a temperature of -18°C (0°F) or lower. At this temperature, the quality changes will be slow.

- **Packaging**

The packaging can also affect the quality of frozen seafood. Seafood should be packaged in a way that prevents moisture loss and oxidation. Vacuum packaging or modified atmosphere packaging are effective ways to prevent these quality changes. Some of the most common quality changes that occur in frozen seafood include:

Denaturation of proteins

The proteins in seafood can denature during frozen storage, which can result in a loss of texture and flavor. This is caused by the exposure of the proteins to high temperatures during the freezing process. Protein denaturation in frozen seafood can occur due to various factors, and it can lead to changes in texture, flavor, and overall quality. Here are some of the main causes of protein denaturation in frozen seafood and potential solutions to mitigate these issues

Causes of Protein Denaturation

- **Temperature Fluctuations**: Rapid temperature fluctuations during freezing and thawing can cause proteins to denature. Ice crystals can form within the seafood, leading to mechanical damage to the protein structure.
- **Freezing and Thawing**: Incorrect freezing and thawing methods can result in denaturation. Slow freezing or improper thawing can lead to large ice crystals forming within the tissue, damaging the protein structure.
- **Storage Conditions**: Prolonged storage at temperatures above the recommended freezer temperature (-18°C or 0°F) can cause protein denaturation over time.
- **Oxidation**: Exposure to oxygen can lead to oxidative damage to proteins, altering their structure and causing denaturation. This can occur during storage or processing.

Solutions to Prevent Protein Denaturation in Frozen Seafood

1) **Proper Freezing Techniques**: Use rapid freezing methods such as blast freezing to minimize ice crystal formation and preserve the integrity of proteins.
2) **Vacuum Packaging**: Vacuum packaging removes air and reduces the risk of oxidation during storage, helping to maintain protein structure.
3) **Controlled Thawing**: Thaw seafood slowly in a controlled environment, ideally in a refrigerator, to prevent temperature fluctuations that can damage proteins.
4) **Low-Temperature Storage**: Maintain a consistent freezer temperature of -18°C (-0.4°F) or lower to prevent protein denaturation during storage.
5) **Protective Coatings**: Some seafood can be coated with protective layers, such as ice glaze or edible films, to shield proteins from freezer burn and reduce denaturation.

6) **Antioxidants**: The addition of natural antioxidants like ascorbic acid (vitamin C) or tocopherols can help minimize oxidative damage to proteins during processing and storage.
7) **Quality Control**: Implement stringent quality control measures to ensure that seafood products are handled, processed, and stored correctly to minimize protein denaturation.
8) **Proper Packaging Materials**: Use packaging materials designed for frozen seafood to prevent moisture loss and maintain product quality.
9) **Educating Consumers**: Provide consumers with instructions on how to properly thaw and cook frozen seafood to minimize protein denaturation during home preparation.

It's essential to follow industry best practices and quality standards to prevent protein denaturation in frozen seafood, as this will help maintain the quality, flavor, and texture of the product for consumers.

Freezer burn

Freezer burn is a common issue that can affect frozen seafood, as well as other frozen foods. It occurs when food is improperly stored in the freezer and results in the deterioration of the food's quality and texture. Freezer burn doesn't make the food unsafe to eat, but it can lead to a less pleasant eating experience.

The main mechanism behind freezer burn in frozen seafood (and other frozen foods) involves a combination of two processes: dehydration and oxidation.

Dehydration: Frozen seafood can lose moisture during storage, which can result in a dry, tough texture. This is caused by the evaporation of water from the surface of the seafood. Freezer burn begins when the moisture within the seafood starts to evaporate, even at freezing temperatures. This occurs because the freezer's air is extremely dry. When the moisture in the seafood begins to sublimate (change directly from a solid to a gas), it leaves the food's surface. As a result, the seafood becomes dehydrated, leading to dry and shriveled areas. This dehydration process can make the seafood lose its juiciness and become tough.

Oxidation: The second part of the freezer burn process involves oxidation. Oxygen can penetrate packaging materials over time, and when it comes into contact with the seafood, it can cause oxidative reactions. These reactions can lead to changes in the seafood's flavor and color. You might notice that freezer-burned seafood often has a grayish or brownish appearance, which is a result of these oxidation reactions.

To prevent freezer burn in seafood and other frozen foods, consider the following tips:

1) **Proper Packaging**: Use airtight, moisture-resistant packaging to prevent air and moisture from reaching the food. Vacuum-sealed bags or a double layer of plastic wrap can help create a better barrier.

2) **Remove Air:** When packaging seafood for freezing, try to remove as much air as possible from the container to minimize moisture loss.
3) **Use Quality Freezer Bags**: Invest in quality freezer-safe bags or containers designed for long-term storage in the freezer.
4) **Label and Date**: Clearly label packages with the date of freezing to help you keep track of storage times.
5) **Maintain Freezer Temperature**: Ensure that your freezer maintains a consistent and appropriate temperature (usually around 0°F or -18°C) to slow down the dehydration and oxidation processes.
6) **Rotate Stock**: Use a first-in, first-out (FIFO) approach to ensure you consume older frozen seafood before newer additions, reducing the chances of freezer burn.
7) **Avoid Over packing**: Do not overpack your freezer, as overcrowding can hinder proper air circulation and temperature maintenance.
8) **Quick Freeze**: Freeze seafood as quickly as possible after purchase or preparation to minimize the time it spends at warmer temperatures.

By following these tips, you can reduce the likelihood of freezer burn in your frozen seafood and maintain its quality for a longer period.

Lipid oxidation

Oxidation is a chemical reaction that can cause seafood to develop off-flavors and rancidity. This is caused by the interaction of oxygen with the fat in the seafood. Lipid oxidation in frozen seafood occurs when the fats or lipids present in the seafood react with oxygen in the air or dissolved in the moisture of the product. This process leads to the degradation of the lipids, resulting in undesirable changes in the flavor, odor, texture, and nutritional quality of the seafood. Understanding the mechanism of lipid oxidation in frozen seafood is crucial for maintaining product quality and shelf life. Here's an overview of the key steps in the lipid oxidation mechanism

- **Initiation**: Lipid oxidation typically begins with the initiation step, where oxygen molecules (O2) are absorbed by unsaturated fatty acids present in the seafood. Seafood lipids are rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), which are more susceptible to oxidation due to their multiple double bonds.
- **Formation of Free Radicals:** The absorbed oxygen molecules can be converted into free radicals, such as hydroperoxyl radicals (HO•), through various processes. This is often facilitated by factors like temperature, light, and the presence of transition metals (e.g., iron or copper), which act as catalysts in generating free radicals.
- **Propagation**: Free radicals initiate a chain reaction of lipid oxidation. They react with neighboring unsaturated fatty acids in a process called autoxidation. This chain reaction involves three main stages: initiation, propagation, and termination. In the

propagation stage, a free radical abstracts a hydrogen atom from a neighboring fatty acid molecule, leading to the formation of a new fatty acid radical and a lipid hydroperoxide (LOOH).

- **Lipid Hydroperoxide Formation**: Lipid hydroperoxides (LOOH) are unstable and can further decompose into secondary products, such as aldehydes and ketones, which are responsible for the off-flavors and odors associated with rancid seafood.
- **Termination**: The chain reaction can be terminated by antioxidants naturally present in seafood, such as tocopherols (vitamin E), or added antioxidants, which can neutralize free radicals and prevent further propagation of lipid oxidation.
- **Synergistic Reactions**: Lipid oxidation can be accelerated by synergistic reactions involving proteins, pigments, and other components in seafood. For example, iron or copper ions can catalyze lipid oxidation by promoting the formation of free radicals.
- **Storage Conditions**: The rate of lipid oxidation in frozen seafood depends on storage conditions. Factors such as temperature, packaging, and the presence of oxygen all play a role. Vacuum packaging or using gas flushing to remove oxygen from packaging can help slow down lipid oxidation.

Control Measures

To prevent lipid oxidation in frozen seafood, it's important to minimize the exposure to oxygen during processing, packaging, and storage. Proper freezing techniques, the use of antioxidants, and maintaining low temperatures can extend the shelf life and maintain the quality of frozen seafood products. Additionally, monitoring for signs of oxidation, such as off-flavors and rancidity, is essential for quality control in the seafood industry.

Microbial spoilage:

Microbial spoilage in frozen seafood can occur when microorganisms, such as bacteria, yeasts, and molds, are not effectively controlled during processing, storage, or handling. While freezing seafood is a common method to extend its shelf life by slowing down microbial growth, it is not a complete guarantee against spoilage. If frozen seafood is not stored properly, it can become contaminated with bacteria. This can lead to spoilage, which can cause off-flavors, discoloration, and the growth of harmful bacteria. Here are some factors and types of microbial spoilage to consider:

- Temperature Fluctuations: Maintaining consistent and sufficiently low temperatures is crucial for preventing microbial growth in frozen seafood. If the temperature fluctuates above the recommended storage temperature (usually -18°C or 0°F), microorganisms can become active and cause spoilage over time.
- Contamination during Processing: Microbial contamination can occur during the processing of seafood before freezing. It's essential to have strict hygiene practices in place to minimize the introduction of harmful microorganisms.

- Packaging: Proper packaging is essential to prevent contamination and freezer burn. Inadequate packaging can lead to moisture loss, which can encourage microbial growth and affect the quality of the seafood.
- Thawing and Refreezing: Repeated thawing and refreezing can create conditions conducive to microbial spoilage. When seafood is thawed, any microorganisms present can become active, and refreezing may not completely kill them.
- Storage Time: Even when frozen at the correct temperature, seafood has a limited shelf life. Over time, microorganisms can slowly degrade the quality of the product.
- Inadequate Cooking: While not directly related to frozen seafood, improper cooking practices can lead to foodborne illnesses caused by pathogens. Cooking seafood to the recommended internal temperature is essential to kill harmful microorganisms.
- Microbial Types: Various microorganisms can spoil frozen seafood, including psychrotrophic bacteria (able to grow at low temperatures), yeast, and molds. These microorganisms can produce off-flavors, odors, and changes in texture and appearance.

To prevent microbial spoilage in frozen seafood, follow these practices:

1) Store seafood at or below the recommended freezing temperature (-18°C or 0°F) to maintain quality and safety.
2) Use proper packaging materials designed for freezing to prevent freezer burn and moisture loss.
3) Practice good hygiene during processing and handling to minimize contamination.
4) Avoid thawing and refreezing seafood whenever possible.
5) Follow recommended storage times and discard seafood past its shelf life.
6) Ensure seafood is cooked to the recommended internal temperature to kill any harmful microorganisms.

By following these guidelines and maintaining a cold chain throughout the seafood's lifecycle, you can minimize the risk of microbial spoilage in frozen seafood and ensure its safety and quality.

Signs of quality loss

There are a few signs that can indicate that frozen seafood has lost quality. These include:

- Dehydration: Frozen seafood that has lost moisture will appear dry and shriveled.
- Off-flavors: Frozen seafood can develop off-flavors, such as a fishy or ammonia smell.
- Toughness: Frozen seafood can become tough and rubbery.
- Discoloration: Frozen seafood can discolor, especially if it has been exposed to air.

To prevent quality loss in frozen seafood, it is important to:

- Choose fresh, high-quality seafood.

- Freeze the seafood as soon as possible after it is caught. Use a fast freezing method, such as blast freezing for this purpose.
- Store the seafood at a low temperature (-18°C or below).
- Package seafood in a way that prevents moisture loss and oxidation. In the case of frozen blocks use wax coated duplex cartons
- Use seafood within its recommended shelf life.

By following these tips, you can help to ensure that your frozen seafood retains its quality and freshness for as long as possible. In addition to the factors mentioned above, there are a few other things that can affect the quality of frozen seafood. These include:

- The time and conditions of storage before freezing.
- Initial microbial load of seafood sample.
- The amount of exposure to air.
- The use of additives.

By understanding the factors that can affect the quality of frozen seafood, you can make informed choices about the seafood you buy and how you store it. This will help you to enjoy fresh, delicious seafood for longer. By following these tips, you can help to ensure that your frozen seafood retains its quality and freshness for as long as possible. Here are some additional tips for choosing and storing frozen seafood:

- Look for seafood that is bright in color and has firm flesh.
- Avoid seafood that has any signs of freezer burn, such as brown or black spots.
- Store frozen seafood in the coldest part of your freezer.
- Do not refreeze thawed seafood.