



Chapter 5

Chemical Quality Indices and Freshness Indicators for Fish and Shellfish **Priya E. R.**

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Products with no proven quality find little space in the market. The term quality represents the consumer acceptability of the commodity. The eating quality of fish determines the acceptability of fish as food to the consumer. The quality of fish begins to deteriorate immediately after catch. Therefore, the fish needs to be preserved well soon after the harvest to maintain its freshness and prevent deterioration. The process of quality deterioration or change in fish or fish product that renders it less acceptable, unacceptable, or unsafe for human consumption is known as spoilage. Spoilage can be

1. Microbial
2. Physical
3. Chemical

The most commonly used method for the quality evaluation of raw fish is sensory evaluation. Although the method is simple and rapid, the main disadvantage is the lack of objectivity. During spoilage, a number of chemical reactions are taking place in the fish muscle. Various compounds are formed during these reactions, which are quantitatively determined, correlated with sensory characteristics, and used as spoilage indices.

During spoilage, various compounds are produced in the fish muscle by autolytic enzymes, putrefactive microorganisms, or chemical reactions and gradually get accumulated in the flesh. Hence the quantitative determination of these compounds will provide a measure of the spoilage process. The spoilage indices for fish and shellfish are as follows:

1. Volatile bases
2. Nucleotides
3. Lipid oxidation products

Total Volatile Bases:

Volatile bases are produced by spoilage bacteria in fish. They are basic nitrogenous compounds such as ammonia, trimethylamine (TMA), Trimethylamine oxide (TMAO), and Dimethylamine *etc.*, The most commonly used index of quality for the freshness of fish is the Total Volatile Base Nitrogen value (TVBN) along with Trimethylamine. Fish with a TVBN



value of 20mg/100g is considered very fresh. The limit of acceptability of TVBN is 35-40 mg/100g beyond which the fish is considered as spoiled.

Trimethylamine (TMA):

Trimethylamine is the specific index used for assessing the freshness of marine fish. In most cases, the TMA concentration is extremely low, normally under 1mg N/100g. Studies indicate that in a few bivalves, the TMA content is about 20mg N/100g. In elasmobranchs and marine teleosts, the viscera, especially the spleen, liver, and kidney contain the most TMA and the muscle the least. The midgut gland has the highest level of TMA in squid.

TMA is derived from TMAO which is critical for osmoregulation in marine fish.

Two types of enzymes are considered to be responsible for the reduction of TMAO to TMA and to DMA and formaldehyde (FA)- endogenous enzymes in fish, and exogenous enzymes produced by spoilage bacteria. The strains of bacteria capable of reducing TMAO to TMA have been found in most species of the Enterobacteriaceae including *Escherichia coli*, *Achromobacter*, *Micrococcus*, *Flavobacterium*, nonfluorescent *Pseudomonas*, *Clostridium*, *Alcaligenes*, and *Bacillus* spp. TMAO is reduced by bacterial enzymes to TMA while the endogenous enzymes reduce TMAO to DMA and then to FA. During frozen storage, the production of DMA is greater than that of TMA. Hence DMA can be used as an index of enzymatic deterioration during frozen storage and TMA as an index of pre-freezing quality. The formation of DMA is accompanied by the equimolar formation of formaldehyde (FA), which can cause the denaturation of myofibrillar protein in fish flesh.

A level of 10-15 mg TMA-N/100g muscle is considered as the limit of acceptability. This level increases with storage time during iced storage hence TMA can be used as a good index of spoilage.

Ammonia:

Bacterial spoilage of fish generates small amounts of ammonia from the free amino acids. The ammonia content can be used as an indication of the extent of spoilage. A greater amount of ammonia is produced during the spoilage of elasmobranchs due to the high content of urea in their flesh. Shellfish can also produce a large amount of ammonia than marine fishes at the early stages of spoilage.

Biogenic amines:

Biogenic amines are non-volatile compounds, found at very low levels in fresh fish. Important biogenic amines are histamine, cadaverine, putrescine, tyramine, tryptamine, spermine and spermidine. Histamine is known to be the causative factor of scombroid poisoning/histamine poisoning in histamine-forming fishes such as mackerel, tuna, sardine, bonito, herring, anchovy

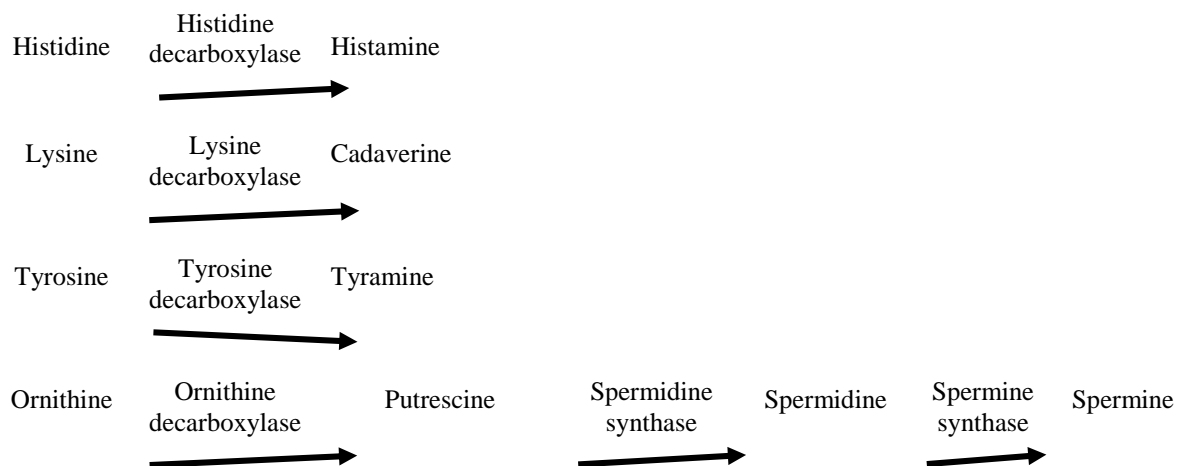
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etc., Food Safety and Standards Authority of India has identified the following family of fishes as histamine forming fish species.

1. Carangidae – 30 species of fishes including jacks, scads, pompanos, queen fishes, kingfishes, and trevallies
2. Chanidae (Milkfish)
3. Clupeidae – 33 species of fishes including Sardine and Shad
4. Coryphaenidae (Mahi Mahi/Dolphin fish)
5. Engraulidae – 9 species of anchovy
6. Istiophoridae – 9 species of Marlin/Sailfish
7. Mugilidae (Mullet)
8. Pristigasteridae – 2 species of Ilisha/Pellona
9. Scombridae – 32 species of fishes including Mackerel, Tuna, Bonito, and Seer fish
10. Xiphiidae (Swordfish)

These fishes are found to be having high free histidine content which gets converted into histamine during spoilage. The biogenic amines formed during the spoilage of fish are found to be thermally stable and thus can be used as an indicator of poor quality of raw material in preserved/processed fishery products. Cadaverine and putrescine are found to be potentiators of histamine. The direct precursors of histamine, cadaverine, and putrescine are histidine, lysine, and ornithine respectively. Putrescine is also an intermediate of a metabolic pathway that leads to the formation of spermidine and spermine.



Although biogenic amines have been associated with fish spoilage, the legal limit has been established for histamine only. As per Food Safety and Standards Regulation (FSSR, 2011), the maximum permissible level of histamine content in fish and fishery products is 200mg/Kg.



Fishes with histamine content up to 20mg/kg are considered to be safe for consumption, 20-100mg/Kg is probably safe while ≥ 100 mg/kg is toxic and unsafe for consumption.

Studies also indicated that cadaverine and putrescine can also be used as freshness indices for fish and shellfish respectively. Fish and fishery products containing cadaverine below 15mg/100g are considered as good for consumption, 15-20mg/100g indicates potential decomposition, and over 20mg/100g advanced decomposition. The quality Index (QI) and Biogenic Amine Index (Bai) are also used to indicate the freshness of fish.

$$QI = \frac{\text{Histamine} + \text{Putrescine} + \text{Cadaverine}}{[1 + (\text{Spermidine} + \text{Spermine})]}$$

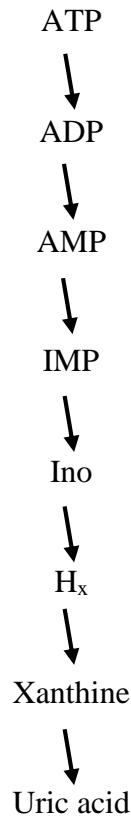
$$BAI = (\text{Histamine} + \text{Putrescine} + \text{Cadaverine} + \text{Tyramine})$$

Indole

Indole is a spoilage indicator in shrimp and crab. Indole (2,3-benzopyrene) is a degradation product of tryptophan. Indole is highly volatile and soluble in different solvents such as hot water, alcohol, ether, and benzene. Shrimp with indole content < 25 mg/100g is organoleptically acceptable.

Nucleotide degradation products:

Nucleotide degradation is one of the earliest indices to assess freshness. It reflects both the action of autolytic enzymes and bacterial action. The nucleotide degradation products – Inosine Monophosphates (IMP), Hypoxanthine (H_x) or K value clearly reflects the quality loss in fish. After the death of the fish, Adenosine triphosphate (ATP) is degraded by endogenous enzymatic action and forms Adenosine diphosphate (ADP), Adenosine monophosphate (AMP), IMP, Inosine (Ino), and H_x successively. Hypoxanthine is further degraded by xanthine oxidase to xanthine and uric acid. The degradation of ATP up to IMP is very fast, but the degradation of IMP is relatively slow. IMP imparts a pleasant, sweet taste and flavor (Umami taste especially in crabs. Degradation of IMP to inosine and hypoxanthine results in bitter taste and progressive loss of desirable flavor. The sequence of nucleotide catabolism in fish as given below:



K value is a biochemical index for fish quality assessment based on nucleotide degradation. K value includes intermediate breakdown products, and it varies with species of fish. K value is the percentage of the intact ATP present at death that has been converted by enzymatic action into hypoxanthine and its immediate precursor called inosine in the chain of decomposition of ATP.

$$K (\%) = \left[\frac{Ino + Hx}{ATP + ADP + AMP + IMP + Ino + Hx} \right] \times 100$$

Lipid oxidation products:

During processing and storage, enzymatic and non-enzymatic lipid oxidation occurs. Lipid oxidation is the limiting factor in fatty fish during storage, which results in rancidity (development of off-flavor and off-odor). The factors affecting the onset and development of rancidity are

1. Degree of unsaturation
2. Type and concentration of antioxidants
3. Pro-oxidants
4. Moisture content
5. Oxygen availability
6. Temperature
7. Degree of exposure to light



The major chemical indicators for the determination of the extent of oxidative rancidity are anisidine value (AV), peroxide value (PV), and thiobarbituric acid value (TBA). Peroxide value is also known as hydroperoxide value, used as a measure of the extent of oxidation in the early stages. It measures the primary products of lipid oxidation, which break down into secondary products of oxidation or reacts with protein. An increase in PV is most useful as an index of the earlier stages of lipid oxidation; as the oxidation proceeds the PV start to fall. AV and TBA measures the secondary product of lipid oxidation. TBA measures the malonaldehyde produced during lipid oxidation. It can be assessed that if the PV value is 10-20 mg oxygen/kg or TBA is above 1-2 mg of malonaldehyde per kg of sample, then the fish will in all probability smell and taste rancid. During prolonged storage of fish, PV, AV and TBA values may increase reaching a peak and decline.

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