



Shark Products: Comprehensive List

This Product may contain...Shark!

Many people assume that because they don't eat shark fin soup – then they can't possibly be contributing to the demise of the sharks and rays. And while shark fin soup does account for a considerable amount of shark consumption, there are many other culprits. It isn't just something that can be blamed on a single culture or country.

Often, many people are surprised – even us from time to time – to discover what shark is actually used in. And it isn't always the usual, easy to identify products, say with the word shark in the product name, like shark steaks, shark teeth or shark leather. Certain energy drinks, pet supplements, vitamins, lotions, dog chew toys, and even lipsticks - to name but a few - are all known to contain shark products. And often, shark is mislabeled as other, more appealing fish.

So here is an ever-growing list of uses for shark products, some obvious, some surprising.

Common Uses for Sharks:

- Shark fins
- Shark cartilage pills / powder
- Manta gill rakers
- Shark liver oil (squalene)
- Shark & ray meat
- Shark & ray leather
- Shark teeth and jaws (and other souvenirs)
- Pet products
- Health foods & energy drinks

Shark fins

Shark fins are sold dried or in the form of prepared foods. These products are sold legally throughout the world, and can be found throughout Asia, as well as in most major cities, typically in areas called "Chinatowns". They can be purchased at stores, restaurants, herbalists and also online from distributors either frozen or dried. Typically shark fins are used for soups; however, there is a plethora of other delicacies that also utilize shark fins. And, given its association with stature, more and more continue to arise – even pet food.

Shark fin soup, a traditional Chinese delicacy associated with prosperity, honor and good fortune, has been a highlight at important occasions such as corporate banquets, weddings, and New Years celebrations for over 2,000 years. One of the eight treasured foods from the sea symbolizing wealth and fit for an emperor, hosts serve shark fin soup to honor their guests and fear their guests would be insulted and they would be considered "cheap" (or lose face) if shark fin soup is not served. Once reserved for special occasions, shark fin is now commonly consumed in major cities as an indication of stature – with its prevalence highlighted by the fact it is even served at low cost buffets.

Over the last 30 years, the number of people eating shark's fin has risen from a few million in the 1980's to more than 300 million today. Research indicates that each year, the fins of up to 73 million sharks are harvested and sold, mostly for shark fin soup. A large percentage of these fins come from open ocean sharks like the blue shark, shortfin mako, silky, bull hammerhead and thresher sharks.

Surprisingly, shark fins are flavorless, and the quality of the soup relies upon the broth – which is typically chicken stock. Fins are really only utilized as a thickening agent. Different shark species have different associated value (the more rare, the more prestigious and expensive the soup) and soup containing a full fin (vs. pieces) is far more desirable as well.

Because of their exponential value, sharks are often killed just for their fins. In the detestable practice called 'sharkfinning' the sharks are often dragged while alive onto fishing boats where a knife with a hot blade is used to slice off all of the shark's fins. Then, the shark is thrown back into the ocean still alive to bleed to death – or drown.

And as the shark population declines, other rays, including the manta are used to augment the shark fin supply, with their cartilage mixed with low grade shark fin.

Shark cartilage pills / powders

Shark cartilage is a very popular dietary supplement and alternative medicine believed to provide benefits to people suffering from a range of ailments from arthritis, asthma, eczema, shingles, rheumatism, hemorrhoids, psoriasis, though one of its best-known uses is as an alternative cure to cancer. It is commonly sold worldwide, despite the lack of clinical evidence that commercial supplements have any beneficial effect. Given the unsubstantiated claims in reference to cancer, it is growing in popularity and availability.

Sold around the world in the form of pills or powders at health food stores, drugstores and anywhere else dietary supplements are sold, these pills are also manufactured worldwide as well. Look for shark cartilage or chondroitin (derived from shark cartilage) on the list of ingredients.

The market for these supplements is unsustainable and, even worse; the cartilage is typically procured from highly threatened species, like the spiny dogfish or blue shark. Continued production and sale of these supplements is certainly contributing to already stressed of shark populations globally.

Manta gill rakers

Manat and mobula gill rakers, which are the rays' branchial gill plates used to filter plankton from seawater allowing the manta to eat are becoming increasingly popular in eastern alternative medicines. Found in dried and powdered form, the gill rakers are sold in traditional and holistic remedy stores.

Although no scientific evidence exists to support any claims, Chinese practitioners believe the consumption of gill rakers – called peng yu sai - help reduce toxins in the blood by purifying and cooling it, reducing body temperature and aiding blood circulation. Its surge in popularity is making dried and ground gill rakers even more valuable than shark fin. And, as shark fin becomes harder to find, rakers are even being offered as an alternative, increasing demand further.

Shark liver oil (Squalene or Squalane)

Squalene/squalane is an oil that is derived from the shark's liver and is used in is used in cosmetic products ranging from anti-aging creams, lotions, deodorants, hair conditioners, eye shadows, lipstick, lip balms, sunscreen, and cleansers. It is also used in vaccines and sold in the form of pills and supplements as it is believed to have medicinal value, and is prevalent in many medicinal creams. Finally, squalene has some limited industrial uses as well, serving as a basis for lubricants and cleaning agents.

A) Cosmetic uses for squalene

Shark-based squalene is commonly used by many consumer product and cosmetic brands you are no doubt familiar with. This year, many have vowed to discontinue their usage of the shark-based squalene, including Ponds, Boots, Dove, Sunsilk, Vaseline, L’Oreal, Lancome, Soft & Dri, Clarins, Sisley and La Mer, which ought to give you a good understanding of how prevalent its use really is. And, there are still plenty of companies that use shark-based squalene, particularly internationally.

In order to alleviate confusion, squalene can come from both animals and plants, though the majority of the time, its origins are shark-based. Often, squalene that is not shark-based is labeled “vegetable”, “vegetable based” or from “vegetable origins” due to recent pressures being placed on companies that utilize shark-based squalane or squalene. But, one cannot simply assume that if squalene is contained in a product, it is derived from shark, which is why it is important to do your homework. Most likely it is, but an enquiry to the manufacture when in doubt is your best bet. Or, visit the list of organizations known to utilize shark squalane/squalene in their products.

Shark-based squalene has a readily available substitute on the market that comes from a purely vegetable origin – olives – which is actually known to be of better quality than shark-based squalene and less expensive as well. Squalene is also found in amaranth seeds, rice bran, wheat germ, fungi and date palm.

B) Medicinal uses for squalene

Not only will you find squalene in the cosmetic and lotion aisles at the pharmacy, you will also find it in the supplement and remedy aisles as well. Shark liver oil is used to promote the healing of wounds, irritations of the respiratory and gastrointestinal tract and general debility – and is a common ingredient in medicinal creams like Preparation H. Given its supposed impact on white blood cells, it is also becoming increasingly popular as a booster for the immune system and even as a way of preventing cancer, sold in a pill form. And, you will also find it in your doctor’s office, as it is added to improve the efficacy of several vaccines, including pandemic flu (yes, even swine flu) and malaria vaccines, by pharmaceutical giants like Novartis.

Squalene is typically derived from the liver of deep-sea sharks, since these sharks have especially large reserves of squalene, as their livers comprise one-third of their entire weight. Consequently, most deep-sea sharks are caught solely for their livers. The excessive targeting of these sharks has caused dramatic population declines of certain species like some of the gulper and dogfish sharks which live over 1000 meters below sea level, greatly impacting their future survival – all for the sake of beauty.

C) The difference an “a” makes

Squalene and squalane can both come from sharks. Squalane is a saturated form of squalene in which the double bonds have been eliminated by hydrogenation. Because squalane is less susceptible to oxidation, it is more commonly used in personal care products than squalene.

For more information on squalane:

<http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/ingredient/706264/SQUALANE/>

For more information on squalene:

<http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/ingredient.php?ingred06=706266>

Shark & Ray Meat

Shark and ray meat is consumed all over the world; however, it is not nearly as popular as other fish species, probably due to processing requirements. Until recently, shark meat was considered of lesser quality and was not heavily featured on menus and store shelves.

However, popularity for shark meat in the western world has risen, and it is quite common in the U.S. to find Thresher or Mako at your local grocery store chain or on a restaurant menu. Both of these sharks are considered vulnerable or nearing extinction. In Europe, the meat of smoothhounds, catsharks, makos, porbeagle and also skates and rays are in high demand and is sold in many major supermarkets. In Australia, several types of shark are commonly consumed, which is why Australia purchases a large majority of the threatened smoothhound, gully and seven-gill sharks caught in South Africa. And in Iceland, Greenland sharks are fished to produce hákarl or fermented shark, which is widely regarded as a national dish.

It is very common to find shark in markets or on the menus of many emerging countries in Africa and the Americas, particularly as other commercially popular fish become less available. And, shark meat, skin and organs have been very popular throughout Asia for years – in countries like Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, and China.

In Japan, not only is shark meat eaten, but so are shark skin and other organs; the salmon shark heart is a very popular sashimi treat.

One quite underhanded technique restaurants and stores often employ is masking the use of shark by changing the name. Take for instance, the poor, little Spiny Dogfish Shark. Who would eat this shark? Well, if you live in the UK, maybe you or someone you know. How is that possible? Because these sharks have been re-labeled in the UK to a more, well, appealing term: Rock Salmon. Indeed, many of the fish & chip shops that so many Brits know and love commonly have Rock Salmon on the menu. Spiny Dogfish Shark is known as saumonette (“little salmon”) in France, and Schillerlocken (“locks of Schiller”) and seeaal (“sea eel”) in Germany. And, in Australia and New Zealand, whitefish fillets or flake are actually elephant or ghosts shark.

Finally, shark is often used as an ingredient in composite fish products. For instance, it is widely utilized in surimi (otherwise known as artificial crab, lobster or shrimp.) And it is known to find its way into generic aggregate products like smoked fish strips, dried stockfish, and whitefish (which is used to produce fish patties and fish sticks.) With all its uses, being an aware consumer is our best defense, as you could easily be eating shark and not realizing it. Shark byproducts are also commonly used in fishmeal (which is used to feed livestock amongst other purposes) and also fertilizers – including those you would purchase at your local garden shop.

Shark and Ray Leather

Since sharkskin is exceptionally durable, it has been used to make leather for decades. However, recently, shark leather has become exceedingly popular, particularly amongst the high-fashion crowd. In fact celebrities such as Will Smith and Gordon Ramsay have been seen wearing it – and the likes of Tory Burch, Jimmy Choo and even Nike use it for their products. You see, stingrays and sharks are in the same family. So buying stingray leather is indeed supporting the mass extinction of the shark & ray family worldwide.

Shark and stingray products can commonly be found in the U.S., Germany, Thailand, France, China and Japan. They are used primarily to manufacture luxury items like boots, shoes, handbags, wallets, belts, cell phone cases, notebooks, and even watchstraps. According to the United Nations, Tiger, Lemon, Dusky, Nurse, Sandbar, Porbeagle, Shortfin Mako, Scalloped Hammerhead, Bull Sharks and Scaly Whip rays are most often used in the manufacture of these goods.

Shark Teeth and Jaws

Throughout the world, shark teeth, jaws, dried sharks and even sharks preserved in bottles can be found in trinket and souvenir shops – particularly those in near proximity to the sea.

Additionally, the use of shark teeth in high fashion jewelry has also become quite prevalent. You can also find shark teeth and jaws openly on marketplaces such as eBay. Only the trade of the species listed on CITES are illegal – meaning white, whale, and basking sharks are supposedly protected. However, white shark products are still openly available in the market (and a black market industry also exists in which jaws from white sharks can sell for over \$10,000 USD.)

A) Fossilized vs. new teeth

It is easy to spot a new tooth. They are white, shiny and look as if they were just pulled from a shark's mouth. Fossilized teeth tend to be grey, black, brown or yellowed and have a significantly aged appearance. Want a shark's tooth? Then buy a fossilized tooth. This is the only way you can ensure a shark wasn't killed specifically for your trinket.

Pet products

Shark is commonly used in many pet products including supplements (particularly for joint health), dog and cat food, and even chew toys. One online retailer recently offered Thresher shark "bully sticks" for sale.

Health foods & energy drinks

In addition to the inclusion of shark cartilage in pills, energy and health drinks can contain chondroitin as well – particularly in Japan. World-renowned Suntory has two such products on the market currently.



UNITED CONSERVATIONISTS