

Fish School

The Marine Mammal Center feeds its patients thousands of pounds of fish per day sustainably. Just like the patients at the Center, you can eat sustainable seafood too!

Beautifully blubbery

Every year, we rescue hundreds of young marine mammals that were separated from their mothers too early or never got the hang of feeding themselves when their moms took off. These pups are often malnourished, which means they haven't been eating enough and are very skinny. They need a layer of blubber, or fat, to stay warm in the cold ocean, so one of our biggest jobs is to feed them lots of food and get them up to a healthy weight again! Can you tell which of the Northern elephant seals below is malnourished and which one is a good weight?



It takes a lot of fish to turn the malnourished pup on the right into the plump, healthy pup on the left. We use hundreds of pounds of fish and other seafood every day to feed all our patients. If you want to help us out, it's easy to do; it costs about \$1 per pound of food, so even the smallest donation helps a lot! To ensure we're caring for the ocean our patients will be released back to especially when using that much seafood, we only use seafood that is sustainably sourced. For example, we feed most of our patients sustainably caught herring from Alaska. If we can find enough sustainable seafood for all our hungry patients, we know you can too!

Teach a seal to fish...

Sometimes, though, pups come to us so young they don't even know what a fish is. We put these pups through "fish school," a program that teaches them how to find and eat fish on their own. We tube feed fish "milkshakes" to pups that are too young for whole food. Then we use tongs to offer them whole fish so they know it's fish, not milkshakes, they should be eating. Once they're interested in fish, we tie a string to a fish's tail and drag it through the pool so the pups learn to chase their prey! Once they know how to chase fish, we "free feed," which means we dump a bucket of fish in the pool and let pups "hunt" for the fish as they sink to the bottom. Ta-da, the pups have graduated fish school and know how to hunt for themselves!

You can see what fish school was like for Juanita, a Northern elephant seal pup, by watching [this video](#). Pay special attention to her technique and then practice your own version of fish school by following these directions:

1. Tie a Swedish fish candy (or goldfish or cut any food you have around to look like a fish) to a string (or floss or ribbon).
2. Sit on the floor with your hands behind your back.
3. Ask a friend to stand in front of you and dangle the Swedish fish near your head.
4. Try your best to “catch” the fish without using your hands or standing up!
5. If you catch the fish, give yourself a flipper on the back. You just graduated fish school!

Create your own sustainably caught fish!

We usually feed our patients sustainably caught herring, but there are all sorts of sustainable species out there. Make a fish print and decorate it like your favorite sustainable fish. If you're not sure which fish are sustainable, check out Seafood Watch and tune in to our next activities to learn more about this awesome program.

Materials:

- Scissors
- Paper
- Paint
- Coloring supplies

Instructions:

1. Cut a sponge into the shape of a fish.
2. Dip the sponge in paint and stamp it on a sheet of paper.
3. Repeat with different colors or sizes of fish.
4. Use paint or other coloring supplies to add an ocean background.
5. For a challenge, you can make sponge prints of other marine organisms and add them to your underwater scene!