

Food Safety During Pregnancy

Why is food safety important during pregnancy?

During pregnancy, your immune system does not work as well as it normally does. This means that it is easier to get food poisoning. Also, if you get food poisoning when you are pregnant, this can sometimes affect your baby.

Other foods and beverages you may eat or drink during pregnancy do not cause food poisoning (such as caffeine containing beverages and high mercury fish), but may still affect your unborn child. The information in this fact sheet will help you to make good food choices to reduce your risk.



Steps you can take

General Food Safety Recommendations

- Practice food safety when handling raw meats, fish, shellfish, poultry and eggs. Wash hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after preparation. Clean and sanitize all surfaces after handling food in the kitchen, especially raw foods, using either:
 - a kitchen sanitizer (follow directions on bottle) or
 - a bleach solution (5mL household bleach to 750 mL of water) and rinse with water.

Wash your hands and surfaces often to help prevent bacteria from spreading! Wash and disinfect your refrigerator often to reduce the chance of bacteria spreading from one food to another.

- Defrost frozen foods in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. Never defrost food at room temperature.

- Fully cook all meats, fish, shellfish, and poultry. You can check that they are fully cooked by using a digital food thermometer. Avoid raw fish and shellfish such as sashimi and sushi (with raw fish), raw oysters, clams and mussels.
- Avoid raw or lightly cooked egg or egg products. Eggs should be cooked until both the white and the yolk is firm; egg dishes should be cooked thoroughly. If a recipe calls for raw eggs, pasteurized egg products can be used.
- Wash raw vegetables and fruit well with clean, running water before eating.
- If you eat sprouted seeds such as alfalfa, clover, radish and mung bean sprouts, make sure these are fully cooked. Raw sprouts can be contaminated with bacteria. Don't eat cooked mung bean sprouts if you are not sure they are fully cooked (for example, in a stir-fry).
- Separate raw and cooked foods to avoid cross-contamination. Clean all knives, cutting boards and utensils between uses.
- Keep hot food hot (60°C or above) and cold food cold (4°C or below). Your fridge should be set to 4°C or lower.
- Put all perishable, prepared food and leftovers into the refrigerator or freezer within two hours.
- Keep leftovers for no more than 4 days, preferably only 2-3 days, in the refrigerator. When serving leftovers, reheat the food all the way through to steaming (to at least 74°C).
- Do not drink unpasteurized fruit juice or cider. Pasteurized juice and cider are safer options, or bring unpasteurized fruit juice and cider to a rolling boil and cool.

Listeria

- Listeria is a type of bacteria that can cause serious food poisoning during pregnancy. It is important that pregnant women avoid foods that could possibly have listeria.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk or eat soft cheese made from unpasteurized milk, unless they are used in a cooked dish. Examples of soft cheeses include brie, camembert, and blue-

veined cheese. Sometimes these cheeses are made with pasteurized milk. If the label does not have this information, contact the producer. Hard cheese, processed cheese, cream cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt are all safe to eat during pregnancy.

- Smoked fish products should not be eaten unless they have been canned, or used in cooked dishes.
- Do not eat refrigerated pâtés and meat spreads. Canned or shelf-stable pâté or meat spreads are safer options.
- Deli meats and hot dogs can be contaminated with listeria. They are also often high in fat and salt, so they are not healthy foods in general. Avoid the following:
 - Hot dogs, unless they are cooked until steaming hot (74°C). Be careful not to spread the liquid from the package onto other foods or surfaces. Wash your hands after handling hot dogs.
 - Deli meats such as bologna, roast beef or turkey breast, unless they are heated until steaming hot. Dried and salted deli meats such as salami and pepperoni are safer alternatives. Wash your hands after handling deli meats.

Mercury in Fish

- Fish is an excellent source of omega-3 fats, which are important for your baby's brain development. Unfortunately, some fish is also high in mercury. High amounts of mercury can be harmful to a growing brain.
- Continue to eat fish as part of a healthy diet, but choose fish that is low in mercury most often.
- Dried imported fish from Asia may also be high in mercury and should be eaten less often.
- For more information about mercury in fish and a list of fish that you can safely eat during pregnancy, see the "Additional Resources" section below.

Vitamin A

- Large amounts of vitamin A can cause birth defects. Do not have more than 10,000 IU of pre-formed vitamin A each day. This includes vitamin A from food, vitamin and mineral supplements, fish liver oils, and some herbal preparations and medications. If you eat liver, limit this to twice a month while you are pregnant because it is high in vitamin A.
- Beta-carotene is not pre-formed vitamin A and is safe to take during pregnancy from food or supplements.

Caffeine

- Having more than 300 milligrams of caffeine per day (about two cups of coffee) can be harmful to your baby. Keep your daily amount to less than 300 milligrams. For more information visit Health Canada's "It's Your Health - Caffeine" factsheet <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/caffeine-eng.php>.

Alcohol

- No amount of alcohol has been shown to be safe during pregnancy. Alcohol should be avoided completely during pregnancy.

Herbal Products

- It is all right to flavour your food with herbs during your pregnancy, but it is not recommended to use high amounts of herbs. Check with your doctor if you are currently using herbal products in tablet, capsule or extract forms.
- The following herbs are considered safe in the amounts commonly used in foods or as herbal tea (2-3 cups per day): ginger, bitter orange/orange peel, echinacea, peppermint, red raspberry leaf, rose hip, rosemary.

Intense Sweeteners

- Health Canada has approved aspartame, acesulfame potassium and sucralose for use, in moderation, during pregnancy. Be sure

that foods made with these sweeteners do not replace more nutritious foods or drinks.

- Saccharin and cyclamates are not recommended during pregnancy. Stevia has not been approved for use by Health Canada because there is not enough information to ensure its safety.

Soy

- When taken in amounts found in foods, and as part of a balanced diet, soy foods are likely safe to take during pregnancy. Large amounts of soy foods are not recommended.
- If you are vegetarian, or vegan, speak with a registered dietitian about the use of soy during pregnancy.
- It is not recommended to take soy supplements (for example, soy protein or isoflavone supplements).

Flax

- Research has not shown any harmful effects from eating moderate amounts of flaxseed or flaxseed oil during pregnancy. Health Canada states that amounts of flaxseed (whole, bruised, cracked, ground, or milled seed) up to approximately 3-4 Tbsp/day (30g/day) or flaxseed oil up to 2 Tbsp/day (28g/day) are acceptable during pregnancy.



Additional Resources

HealthLinkBC www.HealthLinkBC.ca. Medically approved non-emergency health information and advice.

HealthLinkBC File #68m Healthy Eating: Choose Fish Low in Mercury
<http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/hfile68m.stm>

Dietitian Services Fact Sheets available by mail (call 8-1-1) or at
www.dialadietitian.org:

- Healthy Eating for Pregnancy

Health Canada – It's Your Health: Listeria and Food Safety. Available
at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/food-aliment/listeria-eng.php>

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