

# Healthy Eating Guidelines for Food Safety during Pregnancy

It is easier to get a food-borne illness when you are pregnant. Following general food safety recommendations helps you have a healthy pregnancy. Use the information in this fact sheet to help you choose foods that will keep you and your baby safe and healthy.



## Steps you can take

### General Food Safety Recommendations

- When handling raw meats, fish, shellfish, poultry and eggs, wash your hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after preparation.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces after handling food in the kitchen, especially raw foods, using either:
  - a kitchen sanitizer (follow directions on bottle) or
  - a bleach solution (5 mL household bleach to 750 mL of water) and rinse with water.
- Wash your hands and kitchen 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. Do not defrost food at room temperature.
- Fully cook all meats, fish, shellfish, and poultry. You can check that they are fully cooked by using a food thermometer. For a list of safe cooking temperatures visit Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/safe-internal-cooking-temperatures-chart.html>.
- 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, use pasteurized egg products instead.

- Wash raw vegetables and fruit well with clean, running water before eating.
- Fully cook sprouted seeds such as alfalfa, clover, radish and mung bean. Do not eat sprouts if they are not cooked to steaming hot (for example, in a stir-fry). Raw sprouts can be contaminated with bacteria.
- 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 four days, preferably only two to three 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 the safest choice.

## Listeria

- *Listeria* is a type of bacteria that can cause serious food-borne illness during pregnancy which can be harmful to your baby. Women who are pregnant are at a higher risk of becoming ill from *Listeria* than women who are not pregnant.
- Refrigerated ready-to-eat foods with a long shelf life that are eaten without further cooking are at risk of being contaminated with *Listeria*. Some examples of high risk foods include soft cheeses, hot dogs, deli meats and pâtés.
- To reduce your risk of food-borne illness from *Listeria* avoid:
  - unpasteurized (raw) dairy products
  - unpasteurized (raw) cheese
  - unpasteurized fruit juices and cider
  - pre-packaged or prepared fruit and vegetable salads

- raw or undercooked meat, poultry, seafood and eggs.
- Also avoid the following foods unless they are cooked to steaming hot (74°C when measured with a food thermometer):
  - pasteurized soft and semi-soft cheese (e.g. Brie, Camembert, chèvre, feta)
  - pasteurized blue-veined cheese (e.g. Danish blue, Roquefort, Gorgonzola)
  - pasteurized Hispanic-style fresh cheese (e.g. queso blanco, queso fresco, queso panela)
  - refrigerated pâtés, meat spreads and smoked seafood
  - raw sprouts
  - ready-to-eat deli meats and ready-prepared meals.
- Safer choices during pregnancy include: hard cheese (e.g. Parmesan, Cheddar, Swiss, and Colby), processed cheese slices and spreads, cream cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt, when made from pasteurized milk.

## Mercury in Fish

- Fish is an excellent source of omega-3 fat, which is important for your baby's brain development. Some fish is also high in mercury. High amounts of mercury can be harmful to a growing brain.
- Choose fish that is low in mercury more often.
- For more information about mercury in fish, and a list of fish that is safe eat during pregnancy, see the "Additional Resources" section below.

## Vitamin A

- A balanced diet rich in dark green and orange vegetables and fruit provides enough vitamin A for the healthy development of your baby's skin, eyes and immune system.
- Too much vitamin A may cause birth defects, especially during the first trimester. Do not take individual vitamin A or fish liver oil supplements during pregnancy.

- Liver and liver products (e.g. liverwurst spread and liver sausages) are also high in vitamin A. The safest choice is to limit these foods during pregnancy. If you choose to eat liver products, have no more than 75g (2 ½ ounces) per week.
- Choose a prenatal supplement that has less than 10,000 IU (3000 mcg) of preformed vitamin A (often listed as acetate, succinate or palmitate).

## Caffeine

- Having too much caffeine during pregnancy may be harmful to your baby.
- Limit caffeine to 300 milligrams per day. 300 milligrams is about two cups (500 mL) of coffee or six cups of black tea. For more information visit Health Canada [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/addit/caf/food-caf-aliments-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/addit/caf/food-caf-aliments-eng.php).

## Alcohol

- No amount of alcohol has been shown to be safe during pregnancy. The safest choice is to avoid alcohol during pregnancy.

## Herbal Products

- Check with your health care provider 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, and rosemary.

## Sweeteners (Sugar Substitutes)

- Sugar substitutes are safe in moderation during pregnancy. However, it is important that foods and drinks made with these do not replace more nutritious options.
- If you have concerns or questions about using sweeteners, talk to your health care provider or a dietitian.

## Soy

- When part of a balanced diet soy foods and foods containing soy products are safe to eat during pregnancy.
- Soy supplements are not recommended (for example, soy protein or isoflavone supplements).

## Flax

- Limit flaxseed and flaxseed oil to the amounts commonly found in foods.
- It is not recommended to take flaxseed oil as a supplement.



## Additional Resources

For information and advice based on your specific food and nutrition needs and preferences, call **8-1-1** and ask to speak to a HealthLink BC dietitian.

For additional information, see the following:

- HealthLink BC [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca) – Get medically approved non-emergency health information.
- BC Centre of Disease Control. Food Safety & Pregnancy <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/prevention-public-health/food-safety-pregnancy>

*These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.*



## Notes

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