

Food Safety and Hygiene during Pregnancy

During pregnancy, women are more likely to suffer from food poisoning which may also affect the baby. Foodborne illnesses can be difficult to treat, so it is important to always practise good food hygiene.

Tips for food safety and hygiene

When buying food

- Check the expiry dates on food.

When storing food

- Remember to keep food *cool, clean and covered*.
- Store foods at the correct temperature – make sure your fridge is less than 4°C and your freezer is less than -18°C.
- Place perishable foods e.g. dairy and meat products, into the fridge as soon as possible after purchase.
- Separate raw foods from ready-to-eat foods, keeping the raw foods on the bottom shelves of your fridge.
- Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours.

When preparing food

- Wash your hands in warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds and dry your hands thoroughly on a clean, dry hand towel before touching food and after handling raw food, particularly meat, chicken and fish.
- Wash raw fruit and vegetables in clean water before eating.
- Use 2 separate chopping boards for food preparation; one for raw meat or seafood, and the other for ready-to-eat foods like bread and vegetables. Wash chopping boards in hot soapy water after each use. Discard old chopping boards with cracks or knife marks which harbour bacteria.
- Follow the instructions when heating ready-meals – always heat until they are steaming hot throughout.
- Cook all meat, chicken, fish and eggs until they are well done.
- Never re-heat food more than once.
- Always wear gloves when gardening or handling cat litter before meal times. Wash hands after removing gloves.

Food and drinks to avoid during pregnancy

As well as practising good food safety, there are some foods you should avoid during pregnancy because they may cause food poisoning.

Raw or lightly-cooked eggs and foods that contain them

- Examples: runny eggs, home-made mayonnaise, mousse, ice cream and caesar salad dressing, hollandaise sauce, some custards, tiramisu.

- Shop-bought versions of the above are often pasteurised and so are safe to eat – read the packaging to check.
- Make sure to cook eggs until both the yolk and white are solid and opaque.

Unpasteurised milk and dairy products

- Examples: soft or mould-ripened cheese e.g. camembert, brie and blue-veined cheese
- Cheeses that have been made with pasteurised milk are safe to eat, e.g. cheddar, cottage and processed cheeses. Read the packaging to check. Always store cheese in a fridge and for the recommended time.

Raw or undercooked meat, poultry, fish and shellfish

- Example: Parma ham, smoked salmon (unless cooked), rare hamburgers or steak, sushi, sashimi, clams, oysters, pate.
- Foods, meat and fish that are 'smoked' or 'cured' are fine to eat if they are cooked fully before eating.

Other foods to avoid

Shark, swordfish and marlin

- These are not suitable because they may contain high levels of mercury.
- Tuna may contain a smaller amount of mercury, so you should limit your intake to 2 medium-sized cans 140g (5oz) drained weight or 1 fresh tuna steak 140g (5oz) cooked weight a week.

Excess vitamin A and liver

- Vitamin A is an essential nutrient, but high amounts of retinol equivalent vitamin A are not recommended during pregnancy as this may cause problems for your baby's eyes.
- Avoid multivitamin tablets that may contain high levels of Vitamin A check with your midwife or doctor if unsure.
- Avoid liver and liver products, e.g. fish liver oils, liver paté and liver sausage, which are high in vitamin A.

Alcohol

- It is best to avoid alcohol during pregnancy, as the level of safe consumption is unknown.

Caffeine

- High intakes of caffeine are not recommended in pregnancy as the caffeine goes through the baby and can affect how they develop.
- Limit your intake to 2 mugs of coffee per day *or* 4 mugs of tea *or* 1 mug of coffee and 2 mugs of tea.
- Chocolate, coca-cola and energy drinks also contain caffeine and should be limited.
- Avoid medications that contain caffeine – check the label or ask your pharmacist for more information.

Herbal teas and herbal remedies

- Limit to 2 cups a day.

*Updated by Fiona Dunlevy MINDI, Laura Harrington MINDI and Orna O' Brien MINDI
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