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EATING SAFELY DURING PREGNANCY

During pregnancy, you can eat the same things that you normally ate when you were not pregnant. But especially in the first few months of your pregnancy, your baby can be hurt by toxins (poisons) or bacteria (germs). For this reason, you need to be aware of these food dangers and learn how to choose and prepare your food safely.

What Foods Might Be Harmful to My Baby During Pregnancy?

The foods of most concern are certain fish, meat, milk, cheese, and raw foods. Because these are important parts of most diets, you will want to learn to choose the right foods. The chart on the other side of this page will help you with this.

What's the Problem With Fish?

Fish that are large, eat other fish, and live a long time have mercury in them. Too much mercury can cause problems with the development of your baby's brain and nerves. Some fish may also have dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Too much of these toxins may cause problems with the development of your baby's brain and may cause cancer.

So Should I Just Stop Eating Fish?

No! Fish is a wonderful food. It has lots of good protein and omega-3 fatty acids (omega-3s). Omega-3s are important to your baby's brain and eye development. You should not eat some types of fish, but should eat two meals of low mercury fish every week to give you the benefits of omega-3s. Raw fish should not be eaten as it may contain parasites (germs) that could harm you or your baby. Fish that are considered safe to eat during pregnancy are listed on the back of this page.

What Meat Is Dangerous?

In the United States, most of our meat is safe to eat. However, meat that has not been kept cold or that has not been prepared properly may have bacteria or parasites. Raw meat may contain toxoplasmosis. Toxoplasmosis is a parasite that can damage your growing baby's eyes, brain, and hearing. The back side of this page has more information.

What Do I Need to Know About Milk and Cheese?

Some cheese may contain bacteria called Listeria. These bacteria can cause a disease called listeriosis which may cause miscarriage, stillbirth, or serious health problems for your baby. To avoid listeriosis, you should not eat soft cheeses like Mexican-style queso blanco, queso fresco, feta, Camembert, blue cheeses, or Brie if the cheese is made with unpasteurized milk. Read the label and do not eat the cheese if the label says it is made with raw milk or unpasteurized milk. If it is made with pasteurized milk and kept in the refrigerator at 40°F or less, it is safe to eat. Types of cheeses you can continue to enjoy and which types to avoid are listed on the back of this page.

What Do I Need to Know About Raw Foods?

Uncooked meats and fish may contain toxoplasmosis and listeriosis and other bacteria that can be harmful during pregnancy. Raw fish like that found in sushi, and raw shellfish like clams and oysters should not be eaten during pregnancy. Raw alfalfa and bean sprouts and unpasteurized fruit and vegetable juices have lots of vitamins but can also contain disease-causing bacteria. Pregnant women should drink only pasteurized juices. Raw and undercooked eggs may have bacteria that can cause food poisoning. Do not eat food with raw eggs like Hollandaise sauce and home-made Caesar salad dressing.

How Do I Prepare Food Safely?

- Wash your hands and cooking surfaces often
- Keep raw meat away from fruit and vegetables and cooked meat
- Cook your food until it is steaming hot
- Cook meats until no pink remains
- Keep uneaten food cold or frozen
- Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or less
- Keep your freezer at 0°F or less
- Throw away food that is left at room temperature for 2 hours or more
- Do not eat foods if they are past the expiration date on the label

Eating Safely During Pregnancy

Fresh Fish

Do not eat

Shark, swordfish, king mackerel, tilefish, fresh or frozen tuna steaks, orange roughy, or uncooked fish or shellfish

Eat no more than 1 meal a month

Farmed salmon

Eat up to 1 meal a week

Albacore tuna ("white" tuna)

Eat up to 2 meals a week

Shrimp, canned light tuna, canned or wild salmon, pollock, and catfish, cod, anchovies, or flounder

Note: Check local advisories about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in your local waters. If you cannot get advice on this, eat no more than 1 meal a week from fish caught in local waters and do not eat any other fish that week.

Note: Cook fish by broiling, baking, steaming, or grilling. Remove skin and fat before cooking. Do not eat the fat that drains from the fish while cooking.

Deli Meats and Smoked Fish

Do not eat

Deli meat spread or pate

Do not eat unless you reheat to steaming hot

Hot dogs, lunch meat, deli meat (such as turkey, salami, and bologna), or deli smoked seafood

Eat no more than 2 meals a week

Canned smoked fish or meat spread

Meat—Beef, Chicken, and Pork

Do not eat

Any meat that is rotten or raw

Note: Cook all meats all the way through. When you eat meat, you should not see any pink inside the flesh.

Note: After cutting up raw meat, clean the cutting surface with bleach, soap, and hot water before cutting any raw fruit or vegetables.

Milk and Cheese

Do not eat or drink

Unpasteurized or raw milk, feta cheese, Brie cheese, Camembert cheese, blue-veined cheeses, and Mexican-style queso blanco or queso fresco

Eat all you want

Hard cheeses, semisoft cheeses like mozzarella, processed cheese slices, cream cheese, cottage cheese, or yogurt made with pasteurized milk

Drink all you want

Skim or 1% pasteurized milk

Raw Foods

Do not eat or drink

Raw meat, raw fish, raw shellfish, foods with raw eggs, raw vegetable sprouts, or unpasteurized milk or juices

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/foodsafety or www.cdc.gov/travel/pregnancy

Excellent up-to-date information on food safety issues in the United States and abroad.

Partnership for Food Safety Education

www.fightbac.org

The Partnership for Food Safety Education has lots of good information on prevention of illness from the food supply.

Food and Drug Administration

www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/Product-SpecificInformation/Seafood/FoodbornePathogensContaminants/Methylmercury/ucm115662.htm

The Food and Drug Administration published advisories regarding the consumption of fish in March 2004.

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