

Food Safety in Pregnancy

Extension Consumer Food Safety Fact Sheet

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Pregnancy is a time when a great deal of advice is given — some based on science, as well as some that is not. Food safety is one area where a pregnant women needs to seek out scientific information. This will help keep her and her unborn baby healthy and reduce her risk of foodborne illness.



Why is food safety more important for pregnant women?

Pregnant women's bodies naturally undergo hormonal changes that also change their immune systems, making them more susceptible to foodborne illness. Furthermore, her unborn child has an under-developed immune system, so is also at greater risk. All types of foodborne illnesses are a concern for everyone, particularly pregnant women and other vulnerable populations such as the very young, old, and immune-compromised people. However, there are certain harmful microorganisms that can easily transfer from a pregnant woman to her baby, which causes them to be of greater concern, including the following:

- *Listeria monocytogenes*: can lead to a disease called listeriosis, which can cause miscarriage, premature delivery, serious sickness, or even death of a newborn baby.
- *Toxoplasma gondii*: a parasite found in numerous food sources, as well as dirty cat litter boxes and other areas where cat feces can be found. Toxoplasmosis can cause infant hearing loss, mental retardation, and blindness.

What food choices can I make to lower my risk of foodborne illness?

Higher Risk	Lower Risk	Illness Prevented
Raw or undercooked meat or poultry	Meat and poultry cooked to a safe minimum temperature ¹ .	<i>E. coli</i> , <i>Salmonella</i>
Raw or undercooked fish or seafood (i.e. sashimi); refrigerated smoked fish	Previously cooked seafood reheated to 165°F; canned fish and seafood; seafood cooked to 145°F ² .	Parasites, bacteria, such as <i>Vibrio spp.</i>
Unpasteurized (raw) milk	Pasteurized milk.	<i>Listeria</i> , <i>E. coli</i> , <i>Campylobacter</i> , <i>Salmonella</i>
Unpasteurized (raw) fruit juice or cider	Fruit juice or cider labeled "pasteurized."	<i>E. coli</i>

¹ Use a food thermometer to check for the following temperatures: Beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops and roasts: 145°F with a 3-minute rest time after cooking; ground beef, pork, lamb and veal: 160°F; all poultry products, all reheated foods: 165°F

² Pregnant women and young children should also monitor their consumption of fish containing mercury. More information is available from: www.fda.gov/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/BuyStoreServeSafeFood/ucm110591.htm

Higher Risk	Lower Risk	Illness Prevented
Foods containing raw/undercooked eggs, i.e. homemade raw cookie dough, homemade eggnog, homemade ice cream	At home, use pasteurized eggs/egg products in recipes calling for raw or undercooked eggs; when eating out, ask if pasteurized eggs were used.	<i>Salmonella</i>
Soft boiled or "over-easy" eggs	Fully cooked eggs with firm yolk and whites; Dishes containing eggs (quiche, etc.) should be cooked to 160°F.	<i>Salmonella</i>
Raw sprouts (alfalfa, bean, any other)	Cooked sprouts.	<i>E. coli, Salmonella</i>
Unwashed fresh fruits and vegetables	Washed fresh fruits and vegetables; cooked vegetables.	<i>Listeria, Salmonella</i>
Soft cheeses made from unpasteurized (raw) milk, such as feta, brie, Camembert, blue-veined, queso fresco	Hard cheeses, processed cheeses, cream cheese, soft cheeses clearly labeled "made from pasteurized milk."	<i>E. coli, Listeria</i>
Hot dogs, deli meats eaten cold (not reheated)	Hot dogs, deli meats reheated to 165°F immediately before consumption.	<i>Listeria</i>
Unpasteurized, refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads	Canned or shelf-stable pâtés or meat spreads.	<i>Listeria</i>

What other food safety practices should I be following?

All consumers should follow the four basic steps to food safety: clean, separate, cook, and chill. More information is available from: www.foodsafety.gov/keep/basics/index.html

Other useful resources:

- Food Safety for Pregnant Women; USDA, FDA. Available from www.fsis.usda.gov
- FDA and USDA information: www.foodsafety.gov/risk/pregnant
- Nutrition for women: Special considerations and recommendations before, during and after pregnancy: <http://missourifamilies.org/features/nutritionarticles/nut135.htm>
- Your doctor or health care provider should also have good advice and information available.

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