

# Eating Safely During Pregnancy

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## Description

A variety of food is important in pregnancy for your baby's growth and development. Look in the book *From Here Through Maternity* for more information.

Although Canada has one of the safest food supplies in the world, there are some foods that may not be safe in pregnancy. Some may contain bacteria or parasites. For others, there may not be enough information about their safety during pregnancy. These foods may be a risk to you or your baby, so follow the guidelines below while pregnant. Safe food handling is important too-see the information at the end of this sheet.

*Note:* these guidelines are for pregnant women and may not apply to people who are not pregnant.

## Grains

### Limit:

- **Ground flax:** products made with ground flax can be eaten occasionally, not daily. Ground flax contains plant chemicals called lignans. Not enough is known about the safety of lignans in pregnancy. Whole flax seed and flax oil are safe and nutritious.

## Vegetables and Fruit

### Avoid:

- **Raw sprouts**, including bean, alfalfa and radish sprouts. Cooking sprouts before eating greatly reduces the risk. (Risk: *E. coli*, *salmonella*). See the Glossary at the end of this handout for information about these bacteria.
- **Unwashed vegetables or fruits** (Risk: *toxoplasmosis*, *E. coli*, *salmonella*). See the Food Safety section of this handout for more information.
- **Unpasteurized juices and ciders**, which may be found at farmers' markets, roadside stands, juice bars, or the produce sections of grocery stores. Check the label on these types of products for the word "pasteurized". Pasteurization is a heat process to destroy harmful bacteria. Most juices sold in Canada are pasteurized, including those on the grocery shelf and bottled types with a "pop" top. Home-squeezed juices are safe if the fruit or vegetable used is washed well in running water first. (Risk: *E. coli*, *salmonella*)

## Milk and Cheese

### *Avoid:*

- **Soft cheeses** including feta, brie, camembert, blue-veined varieties and Mexican-style cheeses (examples: queso fresco, queso blanco) unless made with pasteurized milk or well-cooked. If the ingredient list does not say if the milk used was pasteurized, avoid it or contact the company for information. (Risk: *Listeria*)
- **Raw or unpasteurized milk:** is untreated milk directly from an animal. It is illegal to sell or give this away in Alberta. All milk sold in grocery stores is pasteurized.

**Tip:** You can safely use cheddar, mozzarella or other firm cheeses, processed cheese, cottage cheese and cream cheese.

## Meat and Alternatives

### *Limit:*

- **Liver** to one-3 oz. (100 g) serving per month. Although liver provides many important nutrients, it is high in vitamin A. Very high amounts of vitamin A can harm a developing baby.

### *Avoid:*

- **Deli meat** (packaged cold cuts or bought at the deli counter) and **hot dogs** (wieners) unless heated until steaming hot to at least 74 degrees Celsius. This includes deli sandwiches bought at sub shops. (Risk: *Listeria*)
- **Refrigerated meat spreads** (examples: pate or liverwurst) and **smoked seafood** (examples: smoked salmon, surimi) that are sold refrigerated, unless heated until steaming hot. (Risk: *Listeria*)
- **Raw or undercooked meat, poultry and fish** including sushi. (Risk: *Listeria*, *toxoplasmosis*)
- **Raw or undercooked (soft) eggs.** (Risk: *salmonella*)
- **Fish** is a healthy choice, but some kinds should not be eaten in pregnancy:
  - *Shark, swordfish, fresh or frozen tuna and canned white tuna.* (Risk: *mercury*). *Canned light tuna* is an acceptable and nutritious choice. Canned white tuna (albacore) is generally higher in mercury than canned light tuna. Use *light* tuna during pregnancy.
  - *Sport fish* (caught in rivers, lakes and streams): Some of these fish may be high in mercury and should not be eaten. For information about fish in your area, go [Alberta Guide to Sportfishing Regulations](#), then select "Other Information".

*The following foods are safe to eat in pregnancy:*

- **Salmon** is a safe and healthy choice in pregnancy. Include it often in your meals. Both fresh and canned salmon are excellent sources of protein, essential fats (omega-3), and other nutrients. Salmon is not a major source of mercury. In some studies, farmed salmon (Atlantic) had higher levels of pollutants than wild salmon (Pacific and most canned varieties). These levels were still within government guidelines. To reduce the levels of pollutants in farmed salmon, remove the skin and brown parts of the fish before cooking.
- There are no limits on other types of fish. This includes sardines, tilapia, haddock, pollock, sole, cod, snapper, herring, trout and shellfish. Enjoy them often in your meals.
- **Peanuts** and peanut butter can be safely eaten by most pregnant women. If there is an immediate family history of food allergy, talk to your doctor.

**Tip:** You can use home-cooked, sliced roasts such as chicken, beef and ham for sandwiches as well as peanut butter, egg, salmon, canned light tuna and safe types of cheese. Other ideas for lunches include leftovers, pizza, salads and any foods made with legumes (examples: lentils, dried beans and peas) or soy products such as tofu. If eating tofu, be sure to use by the expiry date on the package and store as directed.

### **Other Foods**

*Avoid:*

- **Alcohol** because a safe amount is not known for pregnancy. It should be avoided completely. (Risk: *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder*)
- **Herbal teas** except for a few specific kinds (see Tip below). Herbs and herbal products can act like drugs in the body. There is no research to show that they are safe to use in pregnancy. There are few regulations to make sure they are pure when purchased. (Risk: *some herbs can make the uterus contract or can damage other body organs, such as the liver.*)
- **Artificial Sweeteners** containing saccharin, cyclamate or stevia. Other artificial sweeteners are felt to be safe in pregnancy. These include aspartame (e.g. Nutraweet), sucralose (e.g. Splenda), and acesulfame K.

**Tip:** You can safely use these flavoured, herbal, and regular teas in moderation (3 cups per day at most): citrus peel, lemon balm, ginger, orange peel, rose hip tea, and black or green tea. Decaffeinated beverages can also be enjoyed if they do not replace healthier drinks such as milk.

## Food Safety

You can reduce the risk of food-borne illness by following safe food handling guidelines:

- Store perishable foods in the refrigerator (less than 4 degrees Celsius) or freezer (less than -18 degrees Celsius).
- Wash fruit and vegetables, including pre-packaged varieties, by rinsing well under running water (soap or other cleaning solutions are not necessary). Scrub any rough surfaces with a brush. Peeling also helps remove bacteria from the surface.
- Wash hands with hot soapy water after handling raw meat. Wash utensils and cutting boards used for these foods with hot soapy water and rinse with a mild bleach solution (1 tsp. bleach to 3 cups water).
- Cook all meat, fish, and poultry until well done (to at least 74 degrees Celsius). Use a probe thermometer to check the internal temperature.
- Reheat leftovers and precooked ready-to-eat foods to at least 74 degrees Celsius (or steaming hot) for at least 15 seconds.
- Use refrigerated foods as soon as possible: Eat by the "Best Before" date or expiry date for the best quality and to lower the risk of bacteria developing.

## Glossary

**E. coli:** bacterium sometimes found in certain foods, especially undercooked ground beef. It can cause severe symptoms, including vomiting and bloody diarrhea, and may progress to kidney failure.

**Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder:** pattern of physical and mental birth defects including brain damage and growth problems. It can occur in a child when the mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy.

**Listeria:** bacterium found in soil, water, and the stool (bowel movement) of humans and animals. It can cause an infection called Listeriosis, which has symptoms similar to the flu. This can lead to miscarriage, serious illness in the mother, stillbirth, or severe infection in the newborn. Pregnant women are about 20 times more likely than other healthy adults to get Listeriosis if they eat a contaminated food.

**Mercury:** metal that occurs naturally in the environment. Humans can be exposed to it in several ways, including by eating certain types of fish (examples: shark, swordfish, fresh or frozen tuna). In large amounts it can affect the development of the unborn baby.

**Salmonella:** bacterium sometimes found in some foods such as raw sprouts or unwashed vegetables or fruits. It can cause stomach cramps and diarrhea, leading to serious illness

**Toxoplasmosis:** infection caused by a parasite sometimes found in certain foods (example: raw meat) and cat droppings. This infection can harm a growing fetus.

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