

# Eat Safely, Eat Well

## Food Safety During Pregnancy



BC Centre for Disease Control  
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

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## Food Safety During Pregnancy

*Your pregnancy is an important time. Eating safe and healthy foods is important to you and your baby. There are many things to consider when choosing and preparing food. This information is designed to help you make the best choices for you and your baby.*



**Foodborne illness can make your baby sick before and after birth.**

### Why is food safety important during pregnancy?

- Foodborne illness can be caused by eating contaminated food. It can affect everyone, but it can be more serious for you and your baby when you are pregnant.
- During pregnancy your body changes. This includes how your immune system works. These changes may make you more likely to become sick, and certain diseases may cause more serious illness for you and your baby.
- Foodborne illness can make your baby sick before and after birth.

## What should I eat during my pregnancy?

- A well-balanced diet with healthy foods and the nutrients that you need for a healthy pregnancy for you and your baby.
- Foods which are properly washed, stored and cooked to prevent foodborne illness.
- Foods which are safe for pregnant women.



## How can I keep myself and my baby safe from foodborne illness?

- Bacteria that can cause foodborne illness include *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter* and *E. coli*.
- Bacteria can be found in a variety of raw and cooked foods including, meat, poultry, eggs, fruits, vegetables and dairy.
- Bacteria that can cause foodborne illness do not change the smell, look or taste of your food.
- Symptoms of foodborne illness are stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, fever and diarrhea.
- Most foodborne illness is unpleasant, but the symptoms usually go away after a few days. During pregnancy there is a risk of more serious complications for you and your baby.
- Proper food handling and taking steps to **separate, chill, clean** and **cook** will help to prevent foodborne illness.

**Choose foods that are not considered high-risk.**

**Follow safe food handling practices.**

**Listeriosis can be prevented by avoiding certain foods and handling food safely.**

## Listeriosis

- Listeriosis is caused by *Listeria*, a bacteria that can contaminate food and lead to serious illness.
- *Listeria* is unique because it can be found on foods which you do not usually cook and it can grow at refrigerator temperatures.
- Foods that *Listeria* may be found on include: unpasteurized cheese and milk, soft and mould-ripened cheese, deli meats, packaged hot dogs, raw seafood and smoked salmon.
- Listeriosis in pregnant women can cause miscarriage or stillbirth, or your baby can be born very sick.
- Symptoms of listeriosis include fever, headache, nausea and vomiting.
- Listeriosis can be prevented by avoiding certain foods and handling food safely.



## FOODS TO AVOID

All unpasteurized cheese and dairy products

All soft cheeses, even if they are pasteurized (e.g., Brie, Camembert, feta, mould-ripened cheese such as Gorgonzola)

Deli meats (e.g., ham and turkey slices, cured meats such as salami and prosciutto)

Uncooked hot dogs

Refrigerated pâtés and meat spreads

Refrigerated smoked fish and seafood products (e.g. smoked salmon)

Raw and undercooked meat and fish (e.g., sushi, raw oysters, carpaccio, steak tartar)

Raw egg, egg dishes with runny whites/yolk or any food items containing raw or under-cooked eggs as an ingredient (e.g. eggnog, tiramisu)

Unpasteurized juice or cider

Raw sprouts (e.g. alfalfa, mung beans and clover)

## SAFER ALTERNATIVES

Pasteurized hard cheese and dairy products

Pasteurized hard cheese (e.g. Cheddar, Swiss, Parmesan and Colby), or cooked pasteurized soft cheese

Deli meats that are cooked until steaming hot (to internal temperature of 74° C or 165° F or warmer)

Hot dogs that are cooked until steaming hot (to internal temperature of 74° C or 165° F or warmer)

Canned pâtés and meat spreads (they do not require refrigeration until after opening)

Canned smoked fish and seafood products (they do not require refrigeration until after opening)

Cooked meats and fish (e.g., cooked whole chicken breast, roast pork, beef or salmon)

Cooked eggs (until whites/yolk is solid) and dishes containing cooked egg or use pasteurized egg products

Pasteurized juice or cider

Cooked sprouts until steaming hot (to internal temperature of 74° C or 165° F or warmer)

## Safe food handling

Proper cooking, cleaning and storage of your food can remove or reduce the cause of foodborne illness.

There are four key steps in safe food handling:



# SEPARATE

Raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood can be contaminated with bacteria. These raw foods should be kept separated from other foods to prevent the spread of bacteria.

- When shopping keep raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood separate from other foods in your cart and grocery bags.
- Store raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood on the bottom shelf of the fridge in sealed containers.
- If you have used utensils, cutting boards or serving trays for raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood don't use them again until they are washed in hot, soapy water or use clean utensils and plates.



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Bacteria grow rapidly at room temperatures, but more slowly at cold and hot temperatures.

- Raw meat, poultry, fish, seafood, eggs or leftovers should not be left at room temperature for more than two hours. Refrigerate or freeze as soon as possible.
- Keep cold food refrigerated below 4° C (40° F).
- Thaw frozen food in the fridge or microwave, not at room temperature.

**CHILL**



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Washing and sanitizing removes bacteria from food, hands, containers and other surfaces.

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food, changing diapers, touching pets or using the washroom.
- Wash all fresh produce in clean, running water.
- Wash utensils, cutting boards, serving trays and countertops with hot soapy water.
- Sanitize after washing with hot soapy water. To make a sanitizing solution in a spray bottle to use on utensils and surfaces combine 5 mL (1 teaspoon) of household bleach per litre (4 cups) of water. Squirt or wipe the sanitizing solution on countertops and other surfaces. Wipe with a clean cloth or paper towel.

**CLEAN**



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Bacteria that can cause foodborne illness are killed by high temperatures.

- Cook all meat, poultry, fish, seafood and eggs thoroughly and to 74° C (165° F).
- Use a food thermometer to measure the internal temperature of your food. Insert the probe of the thermometer into the centre of the food to read the temperature.
- Keep hot food hot, above 60° C (140° F).

**COOK**



## Nutrition during pregnancy

- Consult with the *Canada's Food Guide*, your health care provider, a dietician or other resources such as *Baby's Best Chance* to ensure you are getting a well balanced diet with the necessary vitamins and nutrients.
- Choose safer options while pregnant to avoid foodborne illness.

## Nutritional benefits and risks of fish

Fish are an important source of protein and Omega 3 fatty acids which are important for your baby's brain development.

Some kinds of fish contain higher amounts of mercury, a metal that can be harmful to a developing brain.

It is recommended that consumption of:

- Ahi tuna (bigeye tuna), escolar, sea-bass, shark, marlin, swordfish and barracuda be limited to 2 servings per month (150 grams).
- Canned tuna (albacore), cod, bass, rockfish and trout be limited to 4 servings per week (300 grams).
- Other fish (salmon, trout, sole and BC or Canadian albacore tuna) can be eaten in any quantities and anytime.

**Salmon, trout, sole and BC or Canadian albacore tuna can be eaten in any quantities and anytime.**





## Did you know?

- Infant botulism is a rare disease that can occur when a child less than one year old swallows spores of *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria, which are found in dirt and dust and can contaminate honey. Honey should not be fed to newborns.
- Avoid gardening and changing cat litter during pregnancy to reduce risk of toxoplasmosis.
- Consume refrigerated leftovers within three days or freeze them for later use.
- Do not refreeze defrosted food.
- Follow all storage and cooking instructions and “best before” dates.



## Additional references

If you have further questions talk to your health care provider or consult with these additional resources.

### **BC Centre for Disease Control**

[www.bccdc.ca](http://www.bccdc.ca)

[http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/a-z/\\_L/Listeria/overview/Listeriosis.htm](http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/a-z/_L/Listeria/overview/Listeriosis.htm)

### **Canada's Food Guide**

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>

### **Best Chance Website**

<http://www.bestchance.gov.bc.ca>

### **Baby's Best Chance**

<http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2010/bbc.pdf>

### **Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education**

<http://www.canfightbac.org>

### **Healthlink BC**

<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca>

### **Do Bugs Need Drugs?**

<http://www.dobugsneeddrugs.org>

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[www.bccdc.ca/foodsafetyinpregnancy](http://www.bccdc.ca/foodsafetyinpregnancy)

