



## Healthy eating in pregnancy

Hormonal changes when you are pregnant can weaken your immune system making it harder to fight off infection. Foods can sometimes be a source of infection so protecting yourself from food borne illness when you are pregnant is extremely important.

### Listeria

*Listeria* is a type of bacteria found in some foods which can cause a serious infection called listeriosis. The flu like symptoms of this illness occur between 2 days and 6 weeks after infection although it has been known to take up to 70 days for symptoms to appear. If passed to your unborn baby listeriosis can cause premature birth, miscarriage, stillbirth or a very ill newborn. Ideally, you should only eat freshly cooked food and well washed, freshly prepared fruits and vegetables.

### Salmonella

Pregnancy does not increase your risk of contracting salmonella, however it can be a very unpleasant experience and in rare cases may trigger miscarriage or longer term complications for the mother. Symptoms of salmonella include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, fever, nausea, and/or vomiting.

### Toxoplasmosis

Whilst toxoplasmosis is rare in pregnancy, it can lead to brain damage or blindness in your unborn child. Although toxoplasmosis can be caused by consuming undercooked meats or unwashed fruit and vegetables (especially from household gardens with cats), it is more commonly caused by contact with cat and dog faeces when cleaning kitty litter trays or touching contaminated soils in the garden. Whilst pregnant, it is important that hands are washed after handling raw meat, food grown in the ground or after touching animals.

### Mercury in fish

Mercury in fish can lead to increased mercury levels in mothers which can pass through the placenta to the unborn child. Mercury can harm the brain or nervous system of unborn babies and young children which can lead to developmental delays. Although it is important to eat fish during pregnancy and when breastfeeding, caution should be used when choosing the type of fish.

### Foods to limit

To minimise the intake of mercury during pregnancy, various types of fish with higher levels of mercury should be limited to:

- shark (flake) and billfish (broadbill, swordfish and marlin), 1 serve (150g) per fortnight and no other fish that fortnight
- orange roughy (deep sea perch) or catfish, 1 serve (150g) per week and no other fish that week
- all other fish (including canned salmon or tuna in oil, mackerel, whiting, trout, trevally, bream, snapper etc) 2-3 servings per week.

When pregnant it is also recommended to limit or avoid alcohol and caffeine.

### Foods to avoid

If you are pregnant it is advised that you avoid the following high risk foods:

- soft and semi soft cheeses (eg. brie, camembert and ricotta)
- cold cooked chicken (as used in sandwiches)
- cold processed meats (eg. ham, salami and pre cut cold meats)
- prepared cold salads (from supermarkets, buffets and salad bars etc)
- raw and smoked seafood (eg. oysters, sashimi, salmon and sushi).

- soft serve ice cream and thick shakes
- pate
- unpasteurised dairy products including goats milk
- raw eggs and food containing raw eggs (including mayonnaise, hollandaise sauce and desserts such as mousses especially when homemade)
- raw or undercooked meats
- raw or lightly cooked sprouts including alfalfa, broccoli sprouts, onion sprouts, sunflower sprouts, clover sprouts, radish sprouts, snow pea sprouts and soybean sprouts.

## General food safety tips

To help keep food you prepare safe, it is important to follow these steps:

- refrigeration does NOT stop the growth of *Listeria*. High risk foods that have been prepared and then stored in a refrigerator for more than 12 hours should not be eaten by pregnant women or other susceptible people
- choose freshly cooked and freshly prepared foods
- thaw food in the refrigerator or microwave
- uncooked meats should be kept covered and separated from cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods to avoid cross contamination
- wash your hands, chopping boards and knives after handling raw foods
- thoroughly wash all raw fruit and vegetables before eating
- do not re-freeze food once it has been thawed
- make sure all food used is fresh and within the used-by date
- cook all meat, chicken and eggs thoroughly
- make sure hot foods are hot (above 60°C)
- make sure cold foods are cold (below 5°C)
- cool left over food in small containers in the fridge. Food should be cooled from 60°C to 21°C within 2 hours and from 21°C to 5°C within a further 4 hours
- eat any leftovers within 24 hours
- reheat leftovers to above 74°C for over 2 minutes.

## Folate and pregnancy

Folate, a B vitamin, is important during pregnancy because it is one of the few nutrients known to prevent neural tube birth defects, such as spina bifida.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that a woman who is thinking about pregnancy or is in the first twelve weeks of pregnancy should take a daily supplement of 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid. As well as taking a supplement, check that your diet contains plenty of folate-rich foods including fresh green leafy vegetables, chick peas, nuts, orange juice, fruits, dried beans and peas. Eating foods fortified with folic acid such as some breakfast cereals, breads and juices can also help in ensuring you are getting enough folate.

## For further information

Queensland Health has a variety of fact sheets with detailed information on food safety. Fact sheets can be accessed from the Queensland Health website at

[www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety).

For further information relating to healthy eating during pregnancy, contact your local Queensland Health Public Health Unit (PHU), local government or medical practitioner (PHU contact details below).

## Queensland Health Public Health Units

Public Health Unit	Phone number
Brisbane Northside	3624 1111
Brisbane Southside	3000 9148
Bundaberg/Wide Bay	4150 2780
Cairns	4226 5555
Gold Coast	5668 3700
Ipswich/West Moreton	3413 1200
Logan	3412 2989
Mackay	4911 0400
Redcliffe/ Moreton Bay	3142 1800
Rockhampton	4920 6989
Sunshine Coast	5409 6600
Toowoomba/Darling Downs	4631 9888
Townsville	4753 9000

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