

Healthy Eating Tips: Food Safety during Pregnancy

Although our food system is one of the safest in the world, there are bacteria, viruses and parasites everywhere in our environment that can contaminate our food and cause illness. If you get a food-borne illness when pregnant, the effects on your baby can be very serious.

Foods such as raw milk, cheese and undercooked meats and sausages contaminated with listeria bacteria are particularly dangerous. Pregnant women are 20 times more likely than other healthy adults to get listeriosis, which can lead to premature birth, infection of the newborn and stillbirth. Likewise, the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii* that causes toxoplasmosis can either cause miscarriage, blindness or leave your unborn baby with a mental handicap.

Toxoplasma gondii

Direct contact with soil and cat feces can expose you to this parasite. If possible, avoid cleaning out the cat box while pregnant. If you must change litter or work in the garden, wear gloves and wash hands well

So do not take chances with unsafe food while you are pregnant. Protect yourself from these and other common sources of food poisoning by handling food safely and avoiding high risk foods.

High-Risk Foods to Avoid

The following foods are to be avoided because they are more prone to contamination by food-borne bacteria such as salmonella, E.coli, listeria, Campylobacter, Staphylococcus aureus.

- Unpasteurized milk, juices and cider. Do not buy fresh raw milk, juices and ciders at the farmer's gate or the farmer's market unless you know it has been pasteurized.
- Soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert and blue-veined cheeses.
- Uncooked and undercooked meat, fish and poultry. Avoid raw oysters, clams, fish sushi, smoked salmon and steak tartare (raw steak).
- Deli meats such as wieners, sausage, ham, bologna unless you re-heat these foods until steaming hot.
- Pâtes.
- Cold leftovers unless reheated to original cooking temperatures*.
- Raw egg in foods such as homemade ice cream, mayonnaise, caesar salad dressing, eggnog, raw cookie dough, or cake batter. Commercial ice cream, mayonnaise, caesar salad dressing and eggnogs are generally safe to eat if refrigerated.
- Unwashed raw vegetables and fruit. As a general rule, if you cannot wash it or peel it, do not eat it.
- All sprouts. There is no way to make sprouts safe as salmonella and E.coli bacteria may be in the sprout seeds.



Drinking Water Safety

City and town water is regularly tested to ensure that it is safe. For residents who obtain their drinking water from a private well it is recommended that you have your well water tested at least three times a year, preferably in the spring, summer and fall. The Public Health Laboratory and the Perth District Health Unit offers FREE bacterial water testing for all residents with a private well. To obtain a water sample kit and information on what to do if your well water is unsafe please call Health Line at 519-271-7600 ext 267 Listowel area call 1-877-271-7348 or visit our web site at www.pdhu.on.ca.



Avoid Cross-Contamination

To prevent the transfer of bacteria or parasites from one food to another, follow this advice.

- To prevent raw or thawing meats, poultry and fish from dripping on other foods in the refrigerator, double wrap or put them in a covered container and place them below prepared or ready-to-eat foods.
- Wash knives and cutting boards with hot, soapy water after they have come into contact with raw meat, fish and poultry.
- To prevent the bacteria or parasites from raw meat, poultry and fish re-infecting the food once it is cooked, always use clean utensils and dishes to handle and hold the cooked food.
- Change dishtowels and cloths often and allow them to dry out between use since damp cloths are good breeding grounds for bacteria.
- Sanitize dishcloths and cutting boards with a mild solution of 1 teaspoon bleach to 4 cups of water.

Prepare Foods Safely

- Wash your hands well with hot, soapy water before preparing food, after handling raw meat, using the bathroom, changing diapers or touching pets.
- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator or in a microwave, not on the counter top at room temperature.
- Cook poultry and all meat, particularly hamburger patties to a well done stage (no pink colouring, juices run clear)*.
- Cook fish until it is opaque and flaky.
- Cook eggs so the yolk and white are solid, not runny.
- Always refrigerate leftovers right away.
- When cooking or re-heating with a microwave, stir the food and rotate the dish a few times to ensure even heating throughout. Use a food thermometer to make sure cooked and re-heated food has reached a safe temperature*.
- Wash all vegetables and fruit well under running water. Even melon, cantaloupe and oranges must be washed before slicing so that bacteria on the outer surface do not contaminate the edible part of the fruit.

The symptoms of food borne illness are: nausea and vomiting, stomach cramps, diarrhea, muscles aches, feeling dizzy, tired and feverish. Symptoms can appear from one hour up to five days after eating the contaminated food. Seek medical attention if you have a high fever, blood in stools, become dehydrated or the diarrhea lasts more than three days.

* For a list of safe cooking temperatures, please call Health Line at 519-271-7600 ext 267 for Listowel area call 1-877-271-7348 or visit our web site at www.pdhu.on.ca.

Want more information on A Healthy Start for You and Your Baby? Visit our Web site at www.pdhu.on.ca.