



# The Center for Women

*Obstetrics & Gynecology*

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## **Foods to Avoid when Pregnant**

Eating well balanced meals is important at all times, but it is even more essential when you are pregnant. Essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals are needed to help develop the baby. The majority of foods are safe; but you should be careful on some or completely avoid them during pregnancy.

**Raw Meat** – If undercooked or uncooked, it could be contaminated with coliform bacteria, toxoplasmosis and/or salmonella.

**Deli Meat** – It has been known in the past that deli meats could be contaminated with listeria. If listeria crossed the placenta, it may infect the baby which would lead to a life threatening condition for the baby. Always make sure you heat the meat until it is steaming hot.

**Fish with Mercury** – Some fish contains higher levels of mercury. These types of fish have been linked to developmental delays and/or brain damage. Therefore avoid eating shark, swordfish, king mackerel, & tilefish. Lean towards caution and eat very little fish during pregnancy. Canned tuna has lower amounts of mercury so can be eaten but in moderation.

**Smoked seafood** – Refrigerated, smoked seafood often labeled as lox, nova style, kippered, or jerky should be avoided because it could be contaminated with listeria. (These are safe to eat when they are in an ingredient in a meal that has been cooked, like a casserole.) This type of fish is often found in the deli section of your grocery store. Canned or shelf-safe smoked seafood is usually fine to eat.

**Fish Exposed to Industrial Pollutants** - Avoid fish from contaminated lakes and rivers that may be exposed to high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls. This is primarily for those who fish in local lakes and streams. These fish include: bluefish, striped bass, salmon, pike, trout, and walleye. Contact the local health department or Environmental Protection Agency to determine which fish are safe to eat in your area. Remember, this is regarding fish caught in local waters and not fish from your local grocery store.

**Raw Shellfish** - The majority of seafood-borne illness is caused by undercooked shellfish, which include oysters, clams, and mussels. Cooking helps prevent some types of infection, but it does not



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prevent the algae-related infections that are associated with red tides. Raw shellfish pose a concern for everybody, and they should be avoided altogether during pregnancy.

**Raw Eggs** - Raw eggs or any foods that contain raw eggs should be avoided because of the potential exposure to salmonella. Some homemade Caesar dressings, mayonnaise, homemade ice cream or custards, and Hollandaise sauces may be made with raw eggs. If the recipe is cooked at some point, this will reduce the exposure to salmonella. Commercially manufactured ice cream, dressings, and eggnog are made with pasteurized eggs and do not increase the risk of salmonella.

Restaurants should be using pasteurized eggs in any recipe that is made with raw eggs, such as Hollandaise sauce or dressings.

**Soft Cheeses** - Imported soft cheeses may contain listeria. You would need to avoid soft cheeses such as: brie, Camembert, Roquefort, feta, Gorgonzola, and Mexican style cheeses that include queso blanco and queso fresco, unless they clearly state that they are made from pasteurized milk. All soft non-imported cheeses made with pasteurized milk are safe to eat.

**Unpasteurized Milk** - Unpasteurized milk may contain listeria. Make sure that any milk you drink is pasteurized.

**Pate** - Refrigerated pate or meat spreads should be avoided because they may contain the bacteria listeria. Canned pate or shelf-safe meat spreads can be eaten.

**Caffeine** - Although most studies show that caffeine intake in moderation is permissible, there are others that show that caffeine intake may be related to miscarriages. Avoid caffeine during the first trimester to reduce the likelihood of a miscarriage. As a general rule, caffeine should be limited to fewer than 200 mg per day during pregnancy. Caffeine is a diuretic, which means it helps eliminate fluids from the body.

This can result in water and calcium loss. It is important that you are drinking plenty of water, juice, and milk rather than caffeinated beverages. Some research shows that large amounts of caffeine are associated with miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight, and withdrawal symptoms in infants. The safest thing is to refrain from consuming caffeine.



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**Alcohol** - There is **NO** amount of alcohol that is known to be safe during pregnancy, and therefore alcohol should be avoided during pregnancy. Prenatal exposure to alcohol can interfere with the healthy development of the baby. Depending on the amount, timing, and pattern of use, alcohol consumption during pregnancy can lead to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or other developmental disorders.

If you consumed alcohol before you knew you were pregnant, stop drinking now. You should continue to avoid alcohol during breastfeeding. Exposure of alcohol to an infant poses harmful risks, and alcohol does reach the baby during breastfeeding.

**Unwashed Vegetables** - Vegetables are safe, and a necessary part of a balanced diet. However, it is essential to make sure they are washed to avoid potential exposure to toxoplasmosis.

Toxoplasmosis may contaminate the soil where the vegetables were grown.