

Anyone can get an infection or other type of illness caused by germs or chemicals in foods. Pregnant women are more likely to get a food-borne illness.

Food-borne Illness During Pregnancy

It is important for you to learn about food-borne illness before and during pregnancy. Some illnesses caused by food can harm the pregnancy. There are ways to reduce these risks by learning about foods to avoid and how to prepare and handle food carefully.

For both mother and baby, food-borne illness can cause serious health problems – or even death.

What is a food-borne illness?

Some people call this “food poisoning.” It is a sickness that occurs when you eat food or drink water that contains harmful substances such as:

- ◆ Bacteria.
- ◆ Parasites.
- ◆ Viruses.
- ◆ Certain chemicals.

What are the signs of illness from food?

You may get sick very soon after eating contaminated food or symptoms may not occur for days or weeks. This depends on what type of harmful substance is in the food. A food-borne illness can still harm a pregnancy even if the mother does not feel sick. Food-borne illness may cause:

- ◆ Fever.
- ◆ Headache.
- ◆ Body aches.
- ◆ Upset stomach.
- ◆ Diarrhea.
- ◆ Vomiting.
- ◆ Abdominal cramps.
- ◆ Dehydration.
- ◆ Death.

Why are pregnant women at high risk?

- ◆ Your immune system is weaker during pregnancy. This makes it harder for your body to fight off harmful germs.
- ◆ Your baby's immune system is not fully ready to fight off harmful germs.
- ◆ For both mother and baby, food-borne illness can cause serious health problems – or even death.

What foods to eat during pregnancy and what foods to avoid:

Certain foods can put pregnant women at a higher risk for food-borne disease. Pregnant women should avoid uncooked meat, poultry and seafood, and unpasteurized dairy products and juices. **Table 2** lists foods to be avoided and ones that are safe to eat.



If you're unsure about the ingredients in a particular dish, ask your server before ordering it. Refer to *Table 2* to find foods safe to eat during pregnancy.

Table 2: Foods Safe to Eat or to Avoid During Pregnancy

Food Group	Safe to Eat	Avoid Eating
Fruits and Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Washed fruits and vegetables ◆ Cooked sprouts ◆ Pasteurized juice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Unwashed fruits and vegetables ◆ Raw sprouts, such as alfalfa, clover, radish, and mung bean ◆ Unpasteurized juice
Dairy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Eggs that are completely cooked ◆ Pasteurized eggs ◆ Store bought and pasteurized: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mayonnaise ● Dressings ● Sauces ● Cookie dough ● Other products made with eggs ◆ Pasteurized milk ◆ Pasteurized cheeses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Eggs that are not fully cooked, runny, without a firm yolk and egg white ◆ Raw unpasteurized eggs ◆ Products containing raw unpasteurized eggs including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Raw batter, filling or cookie dough ● Eggnog ● Homemade Caesar salad dressing ● Béarnaise, hollandaise and aioli sauces ● Gomemade mayonnaise ● Gomemade ice cream ● Tiramisu ● Mousse ● Meringue ◆ Unpasteurized or raw milk ◆ Unpasteurized cheeses including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Feta ● Brie ● Camembert ● Blue-veined cheeses ● Queso blanco ● Queso fresco ● Panela

Food Group	Safe to Eat	Avoid Eating
Meat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Hot dogs and lunch meats heated until steaming hot ◆ Refrigerated smoked seafood in a cooked dish, like a casserole ◆ Fully cooked meats and poultry ◆ Pre-stuffed whole poultry that has been purchased frozen and cooked frozen, without defrosting first 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Cold hot dogs and lunch meats ◆ Refrigerated smoked seafood including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● salmon ● trout ● whitefish ● cod ● tuna ● mackerel often labeled as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● lox ● nova-style ● kippered ● smoked ● jerky ◆ Undercooked or raw meat and poultry ◆ Refrigerated pâtés or meat spreads ◆ Pre-stuffed poultry that has been purchased fresh and raw
Seafood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Up to 12 oz. a week (2 average meals) of fully cooked fish with low levels of mercury*, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● shrimp ● canned light tuna ● salmon ● pollock ● catfish ● cod ● tilapia ● whitefish ● fish sticks ◆ Up to 6 oz. a week of albacore (white) tuna or tuna steaks, which have more mercury than canned light tuna ◆ Fully cooked shellfish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Fish with high concentrations of mercury*: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● king mackerel ● shark ● swordfish ● tilefish ◆ Raw fish, found in foods such as sushi and sashimi ◆ Raw shellfish including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● oysters ● mussels ● clams ● scallops

* Mercury is a harmful metal found in high levels in some fish. Bigger and older fish usually have high levels of mercury. Unborn and newborn babies are more sensitive to mercury than adults. Pregnant and breastfeeding women should avoid fish with high levels of mercury. Pregnant women should eat a variety of fish with low levels of mercury, up to 12 oz. a week. The FDA has more information on mercury in fish and shellfish at:

www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm110591.htm.

For more information on food safety, visit *Food Safety* on page 101.

For more on food diseases and food safety during pregnancy see:

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA):

Health and Nutrition Information for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women

www.choosemyplate.gov/pregnancy-breastfeeding/food-safety.html

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service: Fact Sheets

www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/

Is It Done Yet? Thermometer Placement & Temperatures

www.fsis.usda.gov/Is_It_Done_Yet/

Kitchen Companion; Your Safe Food Handbook

www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Kitchen_Companion.pdf

Check Your Steps: Food Safe Families

www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/Check_Your_Steps/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Questions and Answers about Foodborne Illness (sometimes called "Food Poisoning")

www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/facts.html

Toxic Substances Portal – Mercury; ToxFAQs™ for Mercury

www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tf.asp?id=113&tid=24

Food and Drug Administration (FDA):

Food Safety for Moms-to-Be

www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/HealthEducators/ucm081785.htm

What You Need to Know About Mercury in Fish and Shellfish

www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm110591.htm

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS):

Safe Minimum Cooking Temperatures

www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/mintemp.html