

Safe Eating During Pregnancy: What to Avoid and How to Stay Healthy



Highlights

Eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods, including vegetables, fruits, lean proteins, dairy, and whole grains.

Avoid raw or undercooked meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products made from unpasteurized milk.

Limit caffeine intake and eliminate alcohol consumption entirely.

Be cautious with leftovers-store them properly and consume them within 24 hours.

Follow safe food handling and hygiene practices.

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Foods to Avoid During Pregnancy

Soft cheeses (brie, camembert, blue cheese, ricotta, feta) unless cooked thoroughly
Unpasteurized milk and dairy products
Undercooked or raw meat, poultry, and fish
Raw or lightly cooked eggs (e.g., homemade mayonnaise, aioli, hollandaise sauce)
Processed and deli meats (unless heated to steaming hot)
Cold-smoked seafood and raw fish (sushi, sashimi, smoked salmon)
Raw sprouts and unwashed vegetables
Liver and liver-based products (due to high vitamin A content)
Alcohol

Caffeinated drinks (coffee, tea, energy drinks, cola)
Certain fish species (shark, swordfish, marlin, orange roughy, catfish) due to mercury levels
Highly processed foods (fast food, chips, processed snacks)

The Risks of Certain Foods

Listeriosis

Soft cheeses and unpasteurized dairy products
Cold-smoked seafood and raw fish
Deli meats, pâté, and cold chicken
Pre-packaged or pre-cut fruit and salads

Toxoplasmosis

Undercooked or raw meat
Unwashed fruits and vegetables
Contaminated water sources

Salmonella

Raw or undercooked eggs
Homemade sauces or desserts made with raw eggs
Undercooked poultry
Raw sprouts

Mercury Exposure

Shark
Marlin
Swordfish
Orange roughy
Catfish

Vitamin A Overdose

Liver and liver-based products \ (no more than 50 grams per week\)

How to Make Sure the Food You Eat Is Safe

General food safety tips:

Wash hands thoroughly before handling food and after touching raw meat.
Cook meat, poultry, and seafood to safe internal temperatures.
Store perishable foods in the refrigerator and consume them before their expiration date.
Wash all fruits, vegetables, and herbs under running water before eating.
Avoid sharing utensils, plates, or drinks with others to minimize the risk of contamination.

Dairy Products

Consume only pasteurized milk and dairy products.
Avoid soft cheeses unless cooked to 75 °C and eaten immediately.
Hard cheeses like cheddar and parmesan are safe to eat.

Eggs

Always cook eggs thoroughly until both the white and yolk are solid.
Avoid homemade sauces, desserts, or dishes containing raw eggs.

Meat and Poultry

Cook all meat and poultry until there is no pink color left.
Avoid cold deli meats and pâté unless reheated to at least 75°C.
Use separate chopping boards for raw meat and vegetables.

Fish and Seafood

Consume only fully cooked fish and seafood.
Avoid sushi, sashimi, and cold-smoked fish.
Follow safe guidelines for mercury consumption in fish.

Fruits and Vegetables

Wash thoroughly under running water to remove bacteria and pesticides.
Avoid pre-cut fruit and salad bars, as they have a higher risk of contamination.
Do not consume raw sprouts due to potential bacterial growth.

Water Safety

If drinking water quality is uncertain, use bottled water or boil water before consumption.
Avoid iodine-based water treatment methods, as excess iodine can affect fetal thyroid function.

Caffeine and Alcohol Consumption During Pregnancy

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)
Low birth weight
Premature birth
Learning disabilities

Instant coffee (1 tsp) - 80 mg
Espresso (1 shot) - 145 mg
Black tea (1 cup) - 50 mg
Cola (375 ml can) - 36 mg
Energy drink (250 ml can) - 80 mg
Milk chocolate (100 g bar) - 20 mg

Eating Leftovers and Allergenic Foods

Refrigerate within two hours of cooking.

Store in a covered container and consume within 24 hours.

Reheat to at least 60°C before eating.

Fish and shellfish

Peanuts and peanut butter

Eggs

Dairy

Tools And Assistance

Consultations with Health Professionals: Talk to your obstetrician, general practitioner, or a registered dietitian. They can help you create a personalized meal plan based on your specific needs, preferences, and any health considerations.

Food Diary: Keeping a food journal can help you monitor your daily intake and identify any nutritional gaps. It can also be a useful tool when discussing your diet with a healthcare provider.

Meal Planning: Planning your meals for the week in advance helps avoid impulsive food choices and encourages healthier eating habits.

Pregnancy and Nutrition Tracking Apps: Mobile apps can remind you to eat regular meals, track your vitamin and nutrient intake, log water consumption, and offer pregnancy-friendly recipes.

Mental Health Support: Taking care of your emotional well-being is just as important as physical health. If you feel anxious about food, body image, or experience external pressures, talking to a mental health professional can be beneficial.

Partner and Family Support: Share your nutritional goals with your partner and family. Getting them involved in grocery shopping, cooking, and mealtime routines can help you stay on track and make healthy eating a shared experience.