

## Food Safety During Pregnancy

This information is aimed at helping you to eat safely during pregnancy without avoiding foods unnecessarily.

See the chart at the end for detailed information on foods from each food group that are safe to eat or should be avoided.

### Alcohol

Heavy drinking can be harmful to your baby, particularly during the early stages of pregnancy; however, the effect of low to moderate drinking is less clear. Not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

### Caffeine

Large amounts of caffeine may increase the chance of miscarriage or low birth weight. It is recommended that pregnant women limit caffeine to 200 mg per day.

This is the amount contained in:

- one to two cups of espresso coffee
- two to three instant coffees
- three to five cups of tea (depending on strength), hot chocolate or cola drinks.

Some energy drinks such as Red Bull and V contain caffeine or guarana (a source of caffeine) and are not recommended for pregnant women.

### Mercury in some types of fish

Fish contain nutrients that are beneficial for pregnancy but there are six types of fish that you should limit due to their mercury content. These are shark (flake), marlin, broadbill, swordfish, orange roughy (also called deep sea perch) and catfish. See the chart below for more information.

Most types of fish are safe and are a good source of omega 3 oils which are beneficial for brain and nervous system development of the baby. Fish are also a good source of iodine. One to three serves a week are recommended. Snack sized tins of tuna and salmon contain less than half a serve and it is safe to have several of these per week. Other types of seafood such as shellfish and crustaceans (e.g., prawns, shrimps) generally contain lower levels of mercury and don't pose a risk unless you eat large amounts often.

## Vitamin A and liver

Limit liver to very small amounts, no more than 50 grams a week, as it contains high levels of a form of vitamin A called retinol which may be harmful to the developing baby. There is no danger of too much vitamin A from other foods.

Pregnancy multivitamins contain a type of vitamin A called beta carotene that is safe even in high doses. Multivitamin supplements that are not designed for pregnancy may contain retinol. Check with your pharmacist if in doubt.

## Food contamination

Some types of food poisoning organisms can cause problems during pregnancy. The risk can be minimised by good hygiene and food handling practices and avoiding high risk foods.

### Listeria

Listeria bacteria can contaminate food and cause listeriosis which is a flu-like infection. In pregnancy this infection can be passed on to the baby and can cause miscarriage, stillbirth or premature birth. Listeria infection is not a common problem and the risk can be reduced by following these tips:

- Eat freshly prepared foods where possible.
- Avoid refrigerated, ready to eat foods that may have been stored for long periods.
- Ensure good hygiene and clean utensils when preparing food.
- Thoroughly wash raw vegetables and fruit.
- Avoid foods such as pate, cold cooked chicken and deli meats such as ham and salami unless reheated to high temperature e.g., on a pizza.
- Avoid coleslaws, salads and fruit salads unless you are sure they have been freshly prepared.
- Avoid soft cheeses (e.g., brie, camembert, ricotta, feta, blue cheese) soft serve ice-cream and unpasteurised dairy products. Soft cheeses in cooked dishes are safe.
- Avoid uncooked or smoked seafood and pre-cooked prawns. Freshly cooked seafood and canned seafood is safe.
- Listeria is killed by thoroughly cooking food. Reheat foods to steaming hot.

### Salmonella

Salmonella food poisoning can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and fever and in rare cases miscarriage. Raw or undercooked (runny) eggs are risky foods for salmonella. Avoid using eggs with cracked shells or foods containing raw eggs.

Sesame seeds are also a salmonella risk so avoid eating sesame seeds and ready to eat products such as tahini, halva and hummus. Sesame seeds that have been heat treated are safe to eat.

### Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is an infection that can cause brain and eye damage in the baby. It can be carried by raw meat and cats' faeces. Thoroughly cook meat, wash vegetables, wear rubber gloves if handling cat litter and wash hands after gardening or handling pets.

Good food handling practices

- Wash hands before preparing foods or eating
- Use separate, clean chopping boards to prevent cross contamination of raw and cooked foods
- Make sure cooked foods are thoroughly cooked
- Don't leave foods to cool too long on the bench. Put them in the fridge as soon as they stop steaming
- Don't eat food that is meant to be in the fridge if it has been left out for more than 2 hours
- Eat leftover foods within 24 hours and reheat foods to 'steaming' hot
- Keep the fridge clean and below 5 degrees
- Cover stored foods
- Thaw frozen food in fridge or microwave, not at room temperature
- Store raw meat below other foods so that there is no chance that it will drip onto them
- Store eggs in the fridge
- Follow best before and use by dates and storage instructions. If in doubt throw it out.

Avoid at-risk foods

It is important during pregnancy to be aware of foods which may cause you and your baby problems. See the table below for details of which foods are safe to eat during pregnancy and those that you should avoid.

For more information

Food Standards Australia New Zealand  
W: [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

	Eat	Avoid	Limit
--	-----	-------	-------

Fresh meat and chicken	Thoroughly cooked meat and chicken are safe. Store leftovers in fridge, use within 24 hours and reheat thoroughly. Hot takeaway chicken is safe if freshly cooked and still hot. Store leftovers in fridge as soon as possible or within 2 hours. Reheat thoroughly and eat within 24 hours	Don't eat raw or undercooked meat	
Liver			Limit liver to 50 grams per week. It has high levels of vitamin A (retinol)

Cold meats	<p>Processed meats are safe if thoroughly cooked to steaming hot and eaten soon afterwards e.g., on a pizza. Pâté, meat paste or fish pastes in cans or jars are safe. These are 'shelf stable' and don't need refrigeration before opening. Refrigerate after opening. (Limit liver pâté due to its high vitamin A level)</p>	<p>Don't eat packaged or unpackaged ready-to-eat meats such as ham, salami, preprepared chicken, chicken loaf, unless reheated to steaming hot. Freshly sliced deli meats are no safer than pre-packaged ones as they can be contaminated by the slicer. Don't eat cold meats, chicken or turkey from sandwich bars. Avoid pâté that needs refrigeration before opening</p>	
------------	--	---	--

Fish and seafood	<p>Freshly cooked fish are safe except for the six types in the 'limit' column. One to three serves of fish per week are recommended. Serve size is 150g.</p> <p>A small can of tuna is half a serve so several can be eaten weekly. You can eat:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• freshly cooked seafood such as shellfish and crustaceans (prawns, lobster etc.)</li> <li>• canned seafood including, canned smoked oysters and mussels, freshly made sushi without raw or smoked seafood</li> </ul>	<p>Don't eat:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pre-cooked prawns as they may not have been freshly cooked</li> <li>• uncooked or smoked seafood such as smoked salmon (except if canned)</li> <li>• raw fish or seafood</li> <li>• sushi with raw or smoked seafood or sushi with other fillings that is not freshly made</li> </ul>	<p>Limit the following fish to once a fortnight with no other fish eaten during that time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shark (flake)</li> <li>• swordfish</li> <li>• broadbill</li> <li>• marlin</li> </ul> <p>Limit these to once a week with no other fish eaten at that time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• orange roughy (also called sea perch)</li> <li>• catfish</li> </ul>
------------------	--	--	--

Dairy foods	<p>You can have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• milk</li> <li>• yoghurt</li> <li>• cream</li> <li>• buttermilk</li> <li>• custard</li> <li>• ice cream (except soft serve)</li> <li>• Safe cheeses include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- hard cheeses</li> <li>- processed cheese</li> <li>- cream cheese</li> <li>- cheese spreads</li> <li>- cottage cheese (follow storage directions on pack)</li> <li>- paneer</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unpasteurized dairy foods</li> <li>• soft serve ice-cream and smoothies made with soft serve ice cream. Risk is related to the cleanliness of the dispensing machine</li> </ul> <p>Avoid the following cheeses unless used in a cooked dish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• brie</li> <li>• camembert</li> <li>• ricotta</li> <li>• feta</li> <li>• blue cheese</li> </ul>	
Eggs	<p>Cook eggs until the yolk thickens</p>	<p>Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• raw or runny eggs</li> <li>• foods that may contain eggs: mousse, eggnog, home-made mayonnaise, aioli, caesar salads in restaurants.</li> <li>• tasting uncooked cake batter that contains eggs</li> </ul>	

Vegetables and herbs	<p>The following are safe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fresh cooked vegetables (wash before cooking)</li> <li>• canned vegetables</li> <li>• frozen vegetables</li> <li>• salad if freshly prepared (except raw alfalfa, bean or snow pea sprouts)</li> </ul>	<p>Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pre-prepared salads from salad bars or smorgasbords as they may not have been freshly prepared</li> <li>• sprouted seeds such as alfalfa, bean sprouts or snow pea sprouts unless thoroughly cooked</li> </ul>	
Fruit	<p>All types are safe except store- bought precut fruit.</p> <p>If fruit is to be eaten whole, wash before eating.</p> <p>Buy whole rockmelon (cantaloupe) and clean the skin before cutting.</p>	<p>Don't eat:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• commercial pre-cut fruit, especially rockmelon</li> <li>• freshly squeezed juices and smoothies from cafes and juice bars (because they use pre-cut fruit, and the juicing machines can be hard to clean)</li> </ul>	



Mayonnaise and dips	Store-bought mayonnaise is safe if kept in fridge. Follow storage instructions.	Avoid: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• homemade and café-made mayonnaise which may contain raw eggs</li> <li>• dips that contain feta or ricotta cheese</li> </ul>	
Soy Products	All are okay e.g., tofu, soy milk, soy yoghurt		
Sesame seeds	Sesame products that have received heat treatment such as sesame oil and sesame seeds on baked products such as bread	Sesame seed and sesame products that are made from ground or whole sesame seeds such as tahini, halva and hummus	
Canned and bottled foods	All are safe. Follow storage instructions after opening.		

Eating out and takeaways	Eat food that is freshly cooked. Make sure hot food is steaming hot.	Avoid: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pre-made food if you suspect it has been stored for a long time</li> <li>• salad bars and smorgasbords</li> <li>• sushi containing raw or smoked seafood or that is not freshly prepared</li> </ul>	
Leftovers	Cold foods should be used within two hours of preparation unless they have been refrigerated. Cooked leftovers are safe if they have been refrigerated as soon as they have stopped steaming and are eaten within a day if reheated thoroughly alternately you can freeze them and reheat them		

Drinks	Artificial sweeteners in moderation are safe for pregnancy.	Avoid: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alcohol</li> <li>• energy drinks that contain guarana or caffeine such as V, Red Bull, Mother</li> </ul>	Limit caffeine-containing drinks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-2 cups of espresso style coffee</li> <li>• 3 cups of instant coffee per day</li> <li>• 4-5 cups per day of tea, hot chocolate or cola drinks</li> </ul>
--------	---	--	--

DISCLAIMER This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your baby or your healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. Burnside Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you or your baby require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.

## Contact

Burnside War Memorial Hospital Inc  
120 Kensington Road  
Toorak Garden SA 5065

Telephone: (08) 8202 7222  
Facsimile: (08) 8364 0038  
Email: [mail@burnsidehospital.asn.au](mailto:mail@burnsidehospital.asn.au)

Please note: a GP or specialist referral is required  
[burnsidehospital.asn.au](http://burnsidehospital.asn.au)