

Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services

Food safety during pregnancy

It is very important to consume safe foods while you are pregnant. Foods that are considered to be ‘high-risk’ include: meat, poultry, dairy products, eggs, deli meats, seafood, cooked rice, cooked pasta, prepared salads like coleslaws, pasta and rice salads, and prepared dishes. High risk foods are more likely to cause food borne illness.

Food-borne illness can affect both the mother and the unborn baby. While Canada has a safe food supply, there are many ways in which bacteria, viruses and parasites can contaminate food and cause food borne illness.

Consuming food products such as unpasteurized (raw) milk, cheese and undercooked meats and sausages can be particularly dangerous for pregnant women. These foods may be contaminated with listeria – a bacteria that causes *listeriosis*. Pregnant women are 20 times more likely than healthy adults to get *listeriosis*, which can lead to premature birth, infection of the newborn or stillbirth. Protect yourself and your unborn baby by consuming safe food and practicing safe food handling during pregnancy.



Foods to Avoid During Pregnancy

To reduce the risk of becoming ill, the following foods should not be eaten during pregnancy:

- Raw eggs; foods made with raw eggs including homemade ice cream, mayonnaise, Cesar salad dressing, eggnog. May also be present in cookie dough or cake batter
- Raw oysters, raw clams, raw fish (including sushi), and smoked fish
- Raw sprouts
- Uncooked deli meats such as ham, bologna, hot dogs and sausage
- Uncooked or undercooked meat, fish, poultry. This includes steak tartare (raw steak)
- Unpasteurized (raw) milk
- Unpasteurized juices and ciders
- Unwashed vegetables and fruit
- Cold leftovers
- Unpasteurized cheeses such as feta, brie, and blue-veined cheese
- Pâtés and liverwurst

The most common symptoms of food borne illness include:

Nausea	Vomiting
Stomach cramps	Diarrhea
Muscle aches	Dizziness
Tiredness	Fever

Symptoms can appear anywhere from two hours up to five days after eating a contaminated food.

Seek medical attention if you have a high fever, blood in your stools, if you become dehydrated or the diarrhea lasts for more than three days.

How to prepare foods safely

Follow these guidelines to reduce the risk of food borne illness during pregnancy:

Clean: Wash hands and surfaces frequently

- Wash your hands before preparing food, after handling raw meat, using the bathroom or touching pets and cat litter. It is



very important to wash your hands after handling

soil or the cat's litter box to prevent becoming sick with *Toxoplasma gondii*, a parasite found in soil and places like cat litter. It can cause blindness or brain damage in your unborn baby or miscarriage

- Wash all vegetables and fruits under running water before you prepare or eat them
- Wash knives and cutting boards with hot, soapy water after they have come into contact with raw meat, fish, poultry or seafood. Food contact surfaces such as cutting boards can be sanitized by using a mild solution of bleach: 5ml (1 tsp) of household bleach to 1L (4 cups) water
- Single-use/paper towels should be used to wipe food contact surfaces and hands whenever possible

Separate: Don't cross contaminate

- Keep raw foods separate from ready to eat foods
- Thaw raw meat, fish, poultry or seafood in the refrigerator. The food should be in a container below ready-to-eat foods, preferably on the bottom shelf
- Use different cutting boards for raw and cooked foods
- Always use clean utensils and dishes to handle cooked food. Do not use a utensil or dish that has touched raw meat, fish, poultry or seafood to touch cooked food

Cook: Cook foods to proper temperatures

- Use a probe thermometer to check the internal food temperature. Insert the thermometer into the thickest part of the food, making sure the thermometer does not touch any bone
- Wash and sanitize the thermometer after each use
- Cook fish, poultry and meats to the proper internal temperature (see table)
- Cook eggs so the yolk and white are solid, not runny
- When cooking or re-heating food using a microwave, stir the food constantly to ensure even cooking and check the temperature to ensure that food is properly cooked



Cook Foods to the Proper Internal Temperature

Food	Internal temperature	
	°C	°F
Whole poultry (e.g., chickens, turkey)	82	180
Poultry pieces, ground poultry	74	165
Ground beef, hamburger patties	71	160
Fish	70	158

Chill: Refrigerated or freeze foods quickly

- Always store hazardous food in the refrigerator at 4°C (40°) or lower. Hazardous foods include meat, poultry, seafood, salads and pastries containing meat, cooked grains; oatmeal, rice etc., custards, puddings, and whipped cream, milk and dairy products, processed deli
- Portion all leftovers into small containers to get foods cooled down faster and refrigerate right away
- Do not thaw hazardous food at room temperature. Thaw hazardous food in the refrigerator, in cold water or in a microwave.

Safe Drinking Water

While you are pregnant, do not drink water from lakes, streams, natural springs, dug wells and wells of unknown safety unless it has been treated. To treat water, bring it to a rolling boil for at least one minute or

add 1.25 ml (¼ tsp) of household chlorine bleach to 4 L (1 gal) of water and let it stand for 15 minutes.

If you have any concerns regarding the quality of your well water, stop drinking it and find another safe source of water to drink. It is recommended you test your well water at least three times per year to find out the quality and safety of your supply.

If you are pregnant or have young children have your well water tested for nitrates. Elevated levels of nitrates in drinking water can be toxic. Infants less than 6 months of age are more susceptible to developing methaemoglobinemia or “blue baby”

syndrome. The Ontario Drinking Water Standards recommend maximum acceptable concentration of nitrate in drinking water as 10 milligrams per litre (mg/L).

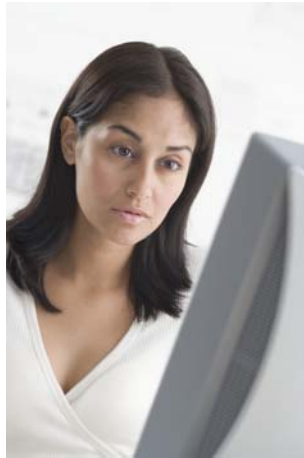


Municipal water is regularly tested to ensure it is safe for drinking. Annual reports are available online for each area municipality and for York Region. For results of your well or disinfecting your private well and any other questions relating to safe water or food safety, please call *Health Connection* at 1-800-3631-5653 (TTY 1-866-252-9933).

Nutrition information on the Web

To learn more about nutrition during and after pregnancy, visit www.york.ca/nutrition. You can access many informative fact sheets and resources on various pregnancy topics, including:

- *Healthy Eating During Pregnancy*
- *A Guide to eating fish for women, children and families* (available in English and Chinese)
- *Calcium – The non-dairy way*
- *Canada's Food Guide* (available in 11 languages)
- *Clarifying the caffeine controversy*
- *Coping with pregnancy discomforts*
- *Food allergies and your baby*
- *Iron works*
- *Omega-3 fat: Reel in the benefits!*
- *Pregnant or breastfeeding? Get the facts on herbal teas and products*
- *Women, folic acid and babies: what's the link?*



- Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada: www.sogc.org

York Region's Health Connection

York Region Community and Health Services *Health Connection* is a free and confidential link to public health services and information in York Region. You can speak to a public health nurse about your pregnancy. You can also speak to a public health inspector if you have any questions about food safety during pregnancy.

Call York Region Community and Health Services *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653. (TTY 1-866-252-9933).



Additional information by phone

- EatRight Ontario – to speak to a registered dietitian
1-877-510-5102
- Motherisk – to speak to someone about medication concerns
416-813-6780

Additional pregnancy information online

- EatRight Ontario: www.eatrightontario.ca
- Government of Canada: www.healthycanadians.ca
- Government of Canada – Information on Food Safety
<http://www.foodsafety.gc.ca>
- Motherisk: www.motherisk.org