



Food Safety during Pregnancy

Safe food is particularly important for pregnant women and their developing baby. When you are pregnant your levels of immunity are lower than usual so you are more at risk of becoming ill. Your illness may also be more severe than it would normally have been and it may harm your unborn baby.

You can protect yourself from foodborne illness during pregnancy by following some **basic food safety tips** (see www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/165367/Basic_food_safety_tips_July_2014.pdf). You should also take some precautions to protect yourself against infection with *Listeria* and exposure to high levels of mercury and iodine.

Listeria

Listeria are bacteria found in some foods that can cause a rare but dangerous infection called listeriosis. If *Listeria* is transmitted to your unborn baby it can lead to miscarriage, still or premature birth.

The best way to avoid *Listeria* is to eat freshly cooked or freshly prepared food. Also:

- Wash fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Cook foods thoroughly.
- Immediately refrigerate leftovers.
- Don't eat leftovers more than one day old.

Try to avoid foods such as:

- soft and semi-soft cheeses unless cooked and eaten while hot (e.g. camembert, fetta, brie)
- cold cooked chicken
- cold processed meats and seafood (e.g. ham, cabana, smoked salmon)
- pre-prepared or pre-packed salads
- raw seafood (e.g. oysters, sashimi)
- soft serve ice-cream
- unpasteurised dairy products (e.g. raw milk)
- pate.

For a complete list of foods to avoid and safer options during pregnancy see the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website at www.foodstandards.gov.au/publications/pages/listeriabrochuretext.aspx

Mercury in fish

Fish is an excellent source of protein, unsaturated fat, omega 3 oils and iodine. Everyone, including pregnant women, should eat fish regularly. However, some fish contain higher levels of mercury that can harm the development of unborn babies, newborns and young children.

Consumption of these types of fish should be limited, especially if you are pregnant.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand provides advice about the number of serves of **store-bought fish** that pregnant women can safely consume per week, as shown in the table below. For more information see their website at www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/chemicals/mercury/Pages/default.aspx

Fish type	Recommended amount for pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children (up to 6 years)
Any fish and seafood not listed below	2-3 serves* per week
Orange roughy (sea perch) or catfish	1 serve* per week and no other fish that week
Shark (flake) or billfish (swordfish/broadfish, marlin)	1 serve* per fortnight and no other fish that fortnight

* 1 serve = 150 grams for adults and 75 grams for children

For **fish caught recreationally** in Tasmania, other limits may apply depending on the amount of mercury in the water. Pregnant and breastfeeding women and women planning to become pregnant are advised not to eat any bream from the Derwent Estuary or Browns River and to limit consumption of flathead and other fish caught in the Derwent to one serve (150 grams) a week. For further information, including consumption limits for the rest of the population, see the Derwent Estuary Program website at www.derwentestuary.org.au/seafood-safety.

Iodine in brown seaweed

Iodine is an essential mineral that we get from the food that we eat such as fortified bread, dairy and seafood. It is especially important for normal brain and nervous system development in unborn babies, newborns and young children.

Generally, pregnant women in Australia do not get enough iodine from their diet. To meet the needs of their unborn or newborn baby, the National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that all women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning pregnancy take an iodine supplement of 150 µg each day.

For more information about iodine supplements see www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/new45

Although iodine is an essential nutrient, consuming too much iodine can also be harmful. Brown seaweed, such as kelp, kombu and wakame, contains naturally high levels of iodine. It is safe when eaten in moderation but there have been cases where pregnant and breastfeeding women have eaten large quantities and their babies have become ill.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand recommends that pregnant and breastfeeding women and children eat no more than one serve of brown seaweed each week. For further information see the Food Standards Australia New Zealand website www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/safety/brownseaweed/pages/default.aspx

For further advice about any of the above food safety issues you should contact your medical practitioner.

As well as avoiding or limiting your consumption of some foods, it is important that you choose a wide variety of foods to meet your baby's nutritional needs. For more information about good nutrition during pregnancy see www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/pophealth/community_nutrition.