

# Diet do's and don'ts during pregnancy

Here's what some experts have to say about some foods you should and shouldn't eat during pregnancy

## ***Fish***

Because of the high mercury content in fish can be harmful, limit your intake of all seafood to 12 oz. a week. "That's about two meals per day" says Dr. David Weinstein. You should never eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tile-fish while pregnant and albacore tuna should be limited to once per week. But seafood contains all sorts of good things, so don't avoid it altogether. Good choices are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, catfish and Pollock. Weinstein says most fast-food fish and fish sticks are OK.

## ***Caffeine***

Official guidelines say no more than 200 mg of caffeine while pregnant. That's about as much as in 2 cups of coffee. So one or two cups of coffee or a few sodas a day are entirely OK (a 12oz. Diet Coke has about 45 mg). Heavy caffeine intake has been linked to low-birth weight babies. Because a study 20 years ago linked caffeine to miscarriage, some doctors advise no caffeine in the first trimester, when miscarriage is most likely.

## ***Organic fruits and vegetables***

Fruits and vegetables are certainly recommended during pregnancy. "Some feel safer with organic food because there are no pesticides," says dietitian Rose Catanzaro. "But I think our food supply is pretty safe." An author Heidi Murkoff says, "While organic foods aren't necessarily more nutritious, eating those means you'll be consuming fewer chemicals."

## ***Milk***

This is a definite "do" during pregnancy. Get three to four servings a day of milk (low-fat or skim is best), yogurt and cheese.

## ***Nuts***

Studies are not conclusive on this one, but some experts have suggested that a mother's intake of nuts could have an effect on her baby's propensity for a food allergy. "If peanut allergies run in the family, you may want to eliminate nuts, but we don't restrict it," says Catanzaro.

## ***Raw alfalfa and bean sprouts***

They are more likely to harbor bacteria because of the way they are grown, says Murkoff. Those bacteria could be E. coli or salmonella.

## ***Smoked Fish***

Refrigerated smoked seafood –such as smoked salmon or trout – should not be eaten unless it is cooked (as in a casserole) or as shelf-stable smoked fish, Murkoff writes in her book.

## ***Meat***

Cooking meat or poultry to the right internal temperature can eliminate bacteria. At restaurants order your meat well-done. If you have any doubts, buy a food thermometer and follow these guidelines from Murkoff's book:

- Beef, lamb or pork roasts, chops or steaks: 170°
- Ground beef, veal, lamb, pork: 160°
- Whole chicken or turkey : 180°
- Ground chicken and turkey 165°
- Fish: 145°
- Egg casserole: 160

## ***Alcohol***

In some cultures, a glass or two of wine a day while pregnant is acceptable. In the United States, doctors warn against it. Why? The risk of fetal alcohol syndrome, a permanent condition characterized by poor growth, abnormal facial features and damage to the central nervous system. "We just don't know what a safe level is, so we generally advise women to stay away from it," Weinstein says. However, eating foods cooked with alcohol is OK, because most of the alcohol burns off in the cooking, says Weinstein.

# Diet do's and don'ts during pregnancy (continued)

## **Sushi**

Raw fish is a no-no in pregnancy. "Pregnant women need to be concerned with food-borne illnesses, and with raw fish, there is a higher risk of that, says Catanzaro. However, that doesn't mean a night out at a sushi restaurant with friends is out of the question. You can safely enjoy a lot of the items without raw fish, such as avocado roll, says Weinstein.

## **Lunchmeat**

Listeria, a bacteria that can cause serious illness in pregnant women, has been linked to lunchmeat and hotdogs. But heating those items can eliminate most of the risk of listeria. "Pop it in the microwave for a few minutes," says Weinstein. "The risk is very, very, very small. I tell patients they have a greater chance of getting hit by a car when they leave my office. Keep it in perspective. There are more important things-like driving safely, avoiding alcohol and quitting smoking."

## **Soft Cheeses**

Soft white cheeses-brie, feta, blue and camembert-are often on the list of no-no's for pregnant women because of the risk of listeria. But if these cheeses are pasteurized, as are the kind you buy at most groceries, they are safe, says Weinstein.

## **Raw Eggs**

Raw eggs are a danger because of the risk of salmonella. And watch out for hollandaise and some Caesar dressings, which are often made with raw eggs. Unfortunately, this also means you cannot have homemade raw cookie dough or eggnog. (The prepackaged varieties are OK, because those eggs have usually been pasteurized.

## **Artificial sweeteners**

Experts say most sweeteners and sweetened products, such as diet soda, are fine if they are made with sucralose (Splenda) or aspartame (Equal). Stay away from saccharin (Sweet N Low), which has been shown at very high doses to cause cancer in laboratory tests and which can cross the placenta. "So I say the yellow (Splenda) and the blue (Equal) packets are OK, but stay away from the pink," Weinstein says. But how much is OK? Use them in moderation" says Catanzaro

## **Herbal supplements**

People don't know enough about herbs says Catanzaro. "Some (such as black cohosh) are not safe in pregnancy, so always ask your physician before you take herbal supplements." You may also want to ask your doctor about unfamiliar ingredients in herbal teas.

## ***Talk about an Unusual food craving***

For some reason, pregnant women often have very unusual and sometimes unsafe cravings in pregnancy. Sometimes they are relatively harmless (ice) and sometimes they are dangerous (cigarette butts, clay, paint chips). This condition is known as pica. Even in the case of ice, eating it often interferes with nutrient absorption. In some studies, these strange cravings have been linked to iron deficiency – even though what the women are craving doesn't necessarily contain a lot of iron. No one knows for sure why they occur, says Rose Catanzaro, a dietitian with St. Louis University. If you have cravings, it's best to seek the advice of your doctor.