Food Safety Guidelines for Pregnant and Breastfeeding Women

Food safety is very important for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

General Guidelines

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially before eating.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked meats, poultry, fish or eggs.
- Avoid unpasteurized dairy products and soft mold cheeses such as feta, Brie and Camembert.
- Avoid refrigerated pate, smoked seafood or meat spreads unless they are part of a cooked dish.
- Eat perishable foods before “use by” date.
- Store food in the refrigerator at 40° or less, or in the freezer at 0° or less.
- Discard foods that look or smell spoiled. When in doubt, throw it out.

When Cooking

- Scrub fresh fruits and vegetables under running water.
- Thoroughly cook meat, poultry, fish and eggs.
- Hot dogs and deli meats may contain bacteria. Cook them again before eating to reduce the risk of infection.
- Raw chicken has a high bacteria count, so be sure chicken juices do not come in contact with other foods or kitchen surfaces.
- Wash hands and utensils with warm water and soap after handling raw foods.
- Clean and disinfect cutting boards, sponges and work surfaces after each use.
When Dining Out

• Eat only at places that look clean and follow food safety guidelines.
• Avoid salad bars that seem unclean.
• Avoid eating fresh foods displayed without refrigeration.
• Ask for food to be well-cooked (meat: well-done; eggs: firm).

Alcohol

• Women should not drink any alcohol during pregnancy. Alcohol has toxic effects on the unborn baby and can cause nutrient deficiencies.
• Even one to two alcoholic drinks per day can increase the risk for miscarriage and the baby’s risk for birth defects and low birth weight.
• While breastfeeding, it is best to avoid alcohol as it passes to the baby through breast milk.

Mercury

• Mercury is an environmental contaminant found in water, plants and animals. High levels of mercury may be harmful to the unborn baby and nursing infant, causing mental retardation, brain and kidney damage.
• Fish collect mercury by absorbing it from water and food. Usually, larger fish contain more mercury than smaller fish. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should be careful to avoid fish or shellfish contaminated with mercury. Some helpful tips include:
  • Completely avoid eating swordfish, tilefish, shark and king mackerel as they most often contain high levels of mercury
  • Choose canned chunk light tuna, which contains less mercury than white albacore tuna
  • Limit intake of albacore (white) tuna, to no more than one serving per week (6 ounces)
  • Include other fish and shellfish in your diet (up to 12 ounces per week). Small ocean fish, pollock, wild salmon, catfish and shellfish are good choices.
  • The Environmental Protection Agency has a fish advisory web site with up to date information: www.epa.gov/ost/fish
  • The Food and Drug Administration also has a web site with food safety tips: www.cfsan.fda.gov
  • The American Pregnancy Association provides information on mercury in fish: www.americanpregnancy.org/pregnancyhealth/fishmercury.htm
Caffeine

For well over a decade, there has been controversy over whether caffeine is harmful during pregnancy. Some studies suggest caffeine increases the risk of miscarriage, early delivery or low birth weight. Other studies have shown that women who consume a moderate amount of caffeine do not experience these problems. Because results are conflicting, we recommend drinking as little caffeine as possible. It is known that caffeine is a diuretic, which means it increases urination and can lead to dehydration. It can also worsen heartburn. There is caffeine in coffee, tea, cola drinks, energy drinks, chocolate and some medications.

Artificial Sweeteners

- The following sweeteners have been well-studied and are approved by the Food and Drug Administration as safe for use in pregnancy and breastfeeding:
  - Acesulfame K (Sunett®, Sweet & Safe™, Sweet One®)
  - Aspartame (Equal®, NutraSweet®, NatraTaste Blue®)
  - Stevia (Stevia in the Raw™, PureVia™, Truvia™)
  - Sucralose (Splenda®)
- Saccharin (Sweet ‘N Low®), however, is not recommended as it crosses the placenta and may remain in the baby’s tissues.
- Sugar alcohols, another type of sweeteners, are modified forms of sugar. The product labels may say “sugar-free” but if you look closely at the nutrition facts on the food label, you will notice that these products are not necessarily lower in calories, fat or carbohydrates. The sugar in the product has been slightly modified, but not removed. Many people have trouble digesting sugar alcohols, and may find that these products can cause gas, cramps or diarrhea.

Eating Right During Pregnancy

Eating a balanced diet is important. This is especially true during your pregnancy. The foods you eat provide the nutrients that you and your baby need. Eating for two does not mean doubling portions. Pregnancy increases your calorie requirements by only about 300 calories per day, which is about the same amount of calories in ½ sandwich and 1 cup of low fat milk. What is most important is selecting a variety of foods from all of the food groups.

The following table provides reasonable guidelines for choosing the foods and portions needed during your pregnancy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Group</th>
<th>Number of Servings per Day</th>
<th>What Counts as a Serving?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grains and Breads</td>
<td>7–9 ounces</td>
<td>Each counts as one ounce: 1 slice bread, 1 small tortilla (¼ large)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>½ burger bun or ½ English muffin, ¼ large bagel, 6 saltine crackers</td>
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<td>1 cup dry cereal, 3 cups popcorn</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>½ cup of cooked rice, pasta, oatmeal, grits, millet, or other cooked grain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meats and Proteins</td>
<td>6–7 ounces</td>
<td>Each counts as one ounce: 1 ounce of meat, poultry, or fish</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1 egg, 2 egg whites, 6 oysters</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1 Tbsp peanut butter, 12 almonds</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>¼ cup cottage cheese, ½ cup tofu</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>½ cup cooked legumes (beans, lentils)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Milk and Dairy</td>
<td>3 cups</td>
<td>Each counts as one cup: 1 cup milk or yogurt</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 cup calcium-fortified soy milk</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1½ ounces cheese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>3 cups</td>
<td>Each counts as one cup: 1 cup raw or cooked vegetable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 cup vegetable juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>2 cups</td>
<td>Each counts as one cup: 1 cup raw fruit, 1 cup 100% fruit juice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>½ cup dried fruit</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To print a personalized diet plan based on your age, weight, height and pregnancy due date, go to www.mypyramid.gov and sign into the pregnancy section.
**Additional Diet Tips**

**Grains**

Make half of your grain servings whole grain choices. Try whole wheat tortillas, whole grain breads, brown rice, oatmeal, millet, bulgur, and whole grain pastas. When reading labels, 3 grams of fiber per serving is a good choice, and 5 grams of fiber per serving means the choice is high in fiber.

**Meats and Proteins**

Poultry and fish are naturally lean. Other lean selections include sirloin, tenderloin, flank steak, lean pork, ham and Canadian bacon. Remove skin from poultry. Avoid fatty meats such as bacon, sausage, hot dogs and ribs. Use low fat cooking methods such as braising, broiling, baking, grilling or poaching. Do not fry. Make sure all meat and egg dishes are cooked until well-done. Do not eat raw or undercooked fish or meat. Deli meats should be re-heated until steaming to reduce the risk of food borne illnesses.

Vegetarian protein sources such as beans and lentils provide beneficial fiber. Many soy-based meat substitutes are available including veggie burgers, tofu hot dogs and soy breakfast links.

**Milk and Dairy**

Choose nonfat and low fat milk and yogurt most often. Look for reduced fat cheeses. All dairy products should be pasteurized. Some cheeses may contain bacteria called listeria. Avoid Brie, Camembert, Roquefort, feta and gorgonzola.

Milk, yogurt and cheese are excellent sources of calcium. Calcium is needed for maternal and fetal bones and teeth. The recommendation for pregnancy is to get at least 1,000 mg of calcium per day. There is 300 mg calcium per cup of milk or yogurt, or per 1½ ounces of cheese. If you do not meet your calcium requirements through diet choices, you may need a calcium supplement. If you take a calcium supplement, more of it is absorbed if you do not take the calcium at the same time as your prenatal vitamin. Also, do not take more than 500–600 mg of calcium at one time because your body cannot absorb it.

**Vegetables**

Vary your vegetable choices. Many different vitamins and minerals are found in vegetables. To get the most out of your vegetables, select different colors and textures. Make sure you eat some of the following: dark green vegetables (broccoli, brussel sprouts, asparagus), orange colors (carrots, yams, winter squash), legumes (kidney beans, pintos, black beans, hummus, lentils, split peas), starchy vegetables (potatoes, corn, peas) and leafy vegetables (romaine lettuce, spinach, arugula, cabbage, kale).

**Fruits**

Choose a variety of fruits including fresh fruits, frozen fruits, or fruits canned in water or their own juice. Dried fruits and juices are concentrated calorie sources.

**Fats and Oils**

Oils, butter, margarine, mayonnaise and salad dressings are all sources of fat. Fats such as these have about 45 calories per teaspoon. A general guideline is to limit fat to 2 tablespoons (total) per day. Other sources of fat include cream cheese, half & half, cream, avocado, olives and nuts. Although vegetable oils are healthier for the heart than animal fats and trans-fats, all fats have the same number of calories. Fats should be limited to control calories if your weight gain is excessive.
You can use food labels on packaged foods to find information on fat content. Look on the Nutrition Facts Label for Total Fat grams. Low fat is defined as 0–3 grams of fat per ounce of meat or cheese (or per serving of all other foods). A medium fat choice has 4–7 grams of fat, and anything with 8 grams of fat or more is a high fat selection.

Notes: