

Health Risks from Food During Pregnancy

Mercury in Fish and Shellfish

Fish and shellfish have many important nutritional benefits. However, nearly all fish and shellfish contain some mercury. Most people don't need to be concerned about the risk from mercury in the fish and shellfish that they eat. But some fish and shellfish have enough mercury to harm an unborn baby or young child's developing nervous system. **Therefore, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are advising women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children to eat fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury, and to avoid some types of fish.**

Recommendations:

1. Do not eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel, or tilefish because they contain high mercury levels.
2. Eat up to 12 ounces (two average meals) a week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.
 - * Five of the most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock, and catfish. Fish sticks and "fast-food" sandwiches are usually made from fish that are low in mercury.
 - * Albacore ("white") tuna and tuna steak have more mercury than canned light tuna. So, when choosing your two meals of fish and shellfish, you may eat up to six ounces (one average meal) of albacore tuna or tuna steak per week.
3. Check local advisories about the safety of fish caught by family and friends in your local lakes, rivers, and coastal areas. (See <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish/> or ask your local health department.) If no advice is available, eat up to six ounces (one average meal) per week of fish you catch from local waters, but don't eat any other fish during that week.
4. Follow these same recommendations when feeding fish and shellfish to your young child, but serve smaller portions.

Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Listeriosis

Listeriosis is a bacterial infection that is most dangerous to pregnant women, newborns, the elderly, and adults with weakened immune systems. People usually get listeriosis by eating infected foods. Babies can be born with listeriosis if their mothers become infected during pregnancy. The early symptoms are usually fever, muscle aches, and sometimes nausea or diarrhea. Symptoms may be mild. Listeriosis can be treated with antibiotics.

To help prevent listeriosis, follow these guidelines at all times:

- Cook all raw meat thoroughly.
- Keep raw meat separate from vegetables and from cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods.
- Wash hands, knives, and cutting boards with soap and water after handling raw meat.
- Wash raw vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Avoid raw (unpasteurized) milk or foods made from raw milk.
- Always thaw ready-to-eat frozen food in the refrigerator or microwave, not on a counter.
- Before eating, reheat leftover food until steaming hot.
- Pregnant women and others at higher risk should also follow these guidelines
- Avoid soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined, and Mexican-style cheese. (There is no need to avoid hard cheeses, processed cheeses, cream cheese, cottage cheese, or yogurt.)
- Cook until steaming-hot any leftover foods or ready-to-eat foods, such as hot dogs, before eating.
- Avoid deli meats or thoroughly cook them before eating.

Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health