

Dear Sofia,

I have heard that I should avoid certain foods during pregnancy. Can you provide information on foods that are safe during pregnancy?

During pregnancy a woman is at higher risk for a food borne illness because her immune system is not functioning as it normally does. This makes it harder for her to fight off some potentially harmful bacteria found in the foods she eats.

Here are some simple rules to follow throughout your pregnancy to help avoid a food borne illness:

- Wash hands well before and after handling raw meats
- Wash fruits and vegetables before eating
- Cook all meats thoroughly
- Avoid juices that are not pasteurized
- Avoid raw eggs
- Avoid raw sprouts as they may harbor more harmful bacteria
- Avoid raw seafood, meat or sushi
- Avoid soft cheeses such as feta, brie, camembert, or homemade cheeses, unless they are made with pasteurized milk (*check labels*)
- Hot dogs and deli meat should be heated until steaming hot to kill off a potentially harmful bacteria called listeriosis, which can grow at refrigerator temperatures

Seafood is another common area of concern for pregnant women. Remember that fish and shellfish contain many essential nutrients, proteins and Omega-3 fatty acids, which can offer many nutritional benefits. What we are concerned about during pregnancy is exposure to fish and shellfish that have higher levels of mercury in them.

Here are some simple rules to follow regarding fish and shellfish during pregnancy:

- Avoid Shark, Swordfish, Tilefish and King Mackerel, they contain high levels of mercury
- Limit all other fish and shellfish to no more than 12 ounces per week, or about 2-3 servings per week
- The five most commonly eaten fish that are low in mercury are; shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock and catfish
- Limit Albacore or "white" tuna to no more than 6 ounces per week
- Avoid sushi or raw seafood
- Check local fish advisories for fish and shellfish caught in Minnesota. Here is the link to the website for the MN Department of Health - Safe Eating Guidelines: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/fish/eating/safeeating.html>

Please talk with your provider if you have any further questions on foods to avoid or limit during pregnancy.