

# Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

## I'm Pregnant! What Can I Eat?

Pregnancy puts lots of limitations on a woman, and food choices are no exception. While these are sacrifices a mother-to-be is happy to make, it can sometimes be difficult to determine what she really can't have vs. what she should be careful with. Below is a list of foods women should avoid during their pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

### **Luncheon or deli meats, processed meats, and foods containing nitrates**

First, these foods are highly likely to carry bacteria because of their handling methods. If a woman chooses to eat them, individual slices should be heated thoroughly. Second, many lunchmeats and processed meats contain nitrates. When consumed, nitrates can turn to nitrites, which have been found to act as carcinogens in the body and can also lead to intrauterine growth retardation, cardiac defects, central nervous system defects, brain tumors, miscarriage, and SIDS.

### **Tap water**

Nitrates and nitrites can also be found in drinking water. Well water offers the greatest risk for high nitrate levels. Filtered or bottled water should be considered, instead.

### **Raw fish sushi, raw eggs and rare meats**

These foods hold too great a risk for carrying bacteria and contaminants, so it is best to avoid them during pregnancy. Cooked fish sushi, vegetable sushi without fish roe, cooked eggs, and well-done meats are fine.

### **Mercury-containing fish**

Eating fish has a lot of health benefits, but the mercury content can be troublesome to pregnant and breastfeeding women and small children. Avoid king mackerel, shark, swordfish, tilefish and tuna steak because of their high mercury content. For guidelines on fish to consume and to avoid, and contacts to determine the safety of fish in your area, go to [www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish](http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fish) and click on the Public Information box.

### **Imported soft cheeses**

Imported cheeses are often produced without pasteurization—the process that kills bacteria. It is best to avoid



them to reduce possible exposure to bacteria. If a pregnant woman does choose to eat them, it is recommended that the cheeses be heated to bubbling to help kill off any bacteria.

### **Sprouts**

While all fruits and vegetables should be thoroughly washed before eating, sprouts are difficult to clean and therefore more likely to carry bacteria than other fresh foods.

### **Peanuts**

If you have a history of peanut allergy in your family, avoid peanuts during pregnancy. Researchers are hesitant to recommend that all mothers restrict the consumption of peanuts because they are a good source of folate and protein. Owing to the growing number of peanut allergies and serious effects of these allergies, however, it may be wise to restrict peanut-containing foods eaten by children until the age of three to prevent allergy development.

### Caffeine

Although drinks such as coffee and soda used to be black-listed for pregnant women, the general consensus is currently that one cup of coffee a day is OK. Excessive caffeine intake has been linked to birth defects, low birth weight, preterm delivery and miscarriage in animal studies, but no conclusive human studies have been completed. In general, no more than 150 to 300 mg of caffeine per day is recommended. To check the amount of caffeine in common products, go to [www.americanpregnancy.org/pregnancyhealth/caffeine.html](http://www.americanpregnancy.org/pregnancyhealth/caffeine.html). Some sodas contain artificial sweeteners or caffeine, so a pregnant woman should read their labels before drinking them.

### Herbal teas

Some herbal teas may have negative effects on pregnancy. Many teas made by companies such as Yogi Tea and Traditional Medicinals will include packaging statements if they are not safe for pregnant or breastfeeding women. If in doubt, ask your practitioner.

### Artificial Sweeteners

The impact of artificial sweeteners on the unborn fetus is not known, but some studies on adults show that high doses of some sweeteners, like saccharin, can cause health problems such as cancer. Since sweeteners do cross the placenta and reach the tissue of the fetus, avoid or limit all artificial sweeteners when possible while pregnant and breastfeeding.

A healthy diet in pregnancy should provide a balanced variety of carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals. For more information about foods to encourage, visit [www.marchofdimess.com](http://www.marchofdimess.com) or <http://revolutionhealth.com> ■

### Fight Nausea with Nutrition

Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> has been found to help alleviate nausea and provide relief to many pregnant women. If you are experiencing nausea, ask your practitioner if this remedy might be right for you. Other remedies for nausea include ginger, Peggie Pops ([www.threelollies.com](http://www.threelollies.com)) and Sea Bands ([www.sea-band.com](http://www.sea-band.com)).

### Prenatal Vitamins

Prenatal vitamins are encouraged throughout pregnancy, but many women experience nausea in response to them. In general, women are strongly encouraged to begin taking a prenatal vitamin several months before they plan to get pregnant, and to continue taking the vitamin at least through the first month of pregnancy, when the child's neural tube and spinal column are developed. It is during that period in particular that folic acid is very important.

After that, a prenatal vitamin is still a great idea, but if the mother is experiencing strong nausea, she may be advised to discontinue use for a few months under the supervision of the health care provider. Instead, try:

- Children's vitamins, like gummy vitamins or chewables. They will very likely go down easier and still provide some nutrients.
- Cereals with vitamins. Brands such as Total are low in preservatives and provide a full day's supply of many nutrients including folic acid, while being low in vitamin A, so they are safe for pregnant women.



For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at [www.acatoday.org](http://www.acatoday.org) or call 800-986-4636.

*Cathy Burke, RYT, ACA director of education, **Writer**  
Nataliya Schetchikova, PHD, and Caitlin Lukacs, **Editors***