

Listeria and food safety during pregnancy

You may have heard of listeria as something to be aware of during pregnancy

What is Listeria?

Listeria is a bacteria found in a range of foods, which can cause a food borne infection – a type of food poisoning – called Listeriosis.

Listeria infection in pregnancy, whilst it may just cause you to have a slightly high temperature and feel a little unwell, listeria presents a serious risk to your baby as the foetus develops. This includes, increased risk of premature birth, miscarriage, still birth or the baby being seriously unwell following delivery.



While the consequences of listeria infection in pregnancy are very serious, there are some simple steps that you can take to protect against listeria infection during pregnancy. This requires you to apply really good food hygiene principles when buying, preparing and storing food and to avoid foods that present a high risk of listeria infection.

Eating out has special challenges, and in general it would be best to avoid foods that have been kept warm in a warmer or bains-marie, or pre prepared foods. Freshly cooked hot food is the best choice when eating out, such as stir fry's, grills and pan fried choices.



To protect against listeria infection during pregnancy, apply really good food hygiene principles when buying, preparing and storing food. Avoid foods that present a high risk of listeria infection

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For the health of you and your baby during pregnancy, it is important that you choose a nourishing, balanced menu, made up of a broad range of foods.

Choose from a selection of vegetables and fruits, dairy foods, breads, cereals and pasta. Include a serve of protein rich food, such as nuts, seeds, lean meat, chicken, beans, peas, lentils and fish (low mercury choices*) with your main meals.

**see page 4*

The foods to choose

- ✓ Yellow, hard cheeses, such as cheddar, colby
- ✓ Processed cheese and individually wrapped cheese spreads with packaging intact
- ✓ Hard frozen ice cream (made without raw egg)
- ✓ Pasteurised, homogenised and UHT milk—keep long life milk in the fridge and use within 3 days once opened
- ✓ Home cooked meats (well done), eaten hot or refrigerated and used within 24 hours of cooking
- ✓ Freshly washed and prepared salads
- ✓ Freshly cooked vegetables
- ✓ Freshly prepared desserts
- ✓ Packaged desserts, used within use by date



The foods to avoid

- ✗ Avoid: All soft cheeses including brie, camembert, ricotta, and fresh feta, unless cooked
- ✗ Avoid: Packaged foods if the packaging is not intact
- ✗ Avoid: Soft serve ice cream and thick shakes
- ✗ Avoid: Foods that contain raw egg
- ✗ Avoid: Unpasteurised dairy products
- ✗ Avoid: All pates and ready to eat cold meats, including deli and packaged meats ie. ham, salami, cooked chicken
- ✗ Avoid: rare undercooked meats
- ✗ Avoid: home cooked meats that have been stored in the fridge for more than 24 hours
- ✗ Avoid: Open ready-to-eat salads (from salad bars, buffets, supermarkets etc)
- ✗ Avoid: Creamy dips, coleslaws or custards that have been left open in the fridge or served at a salad bar
- ✗ Avoid: Raw or smoked seafood (including oysters, smoked salmon, sashimi and sushi)

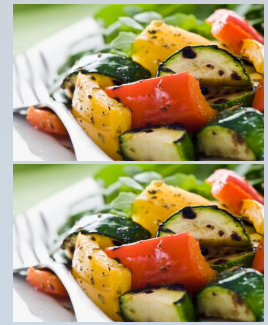


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Extra Care

To protect against listeria infection during pregnancy, avoid foods that present a high risk of listeria infection and take extra care with food hygiene and safety.

The tips below will help you do this



Food Preparation Tips to reduce listeria risk

- Hand washing is vital to food hygiene, it may sound basic, but always wash your hands with soap and water before preparing and eating food.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after handling raw foods.
- Home cooked meats are normally free of Listeria, if used within 24 hours after cooking or if they have been frozen straight after cooking.
- Clean your chopping boards and knives after use, with water and washing up liquid (be particularly careful after chopping raw meat, fish or chicken).
- Choose freshly cooked and freshly prepared foods.
- Thaw food in the fridge or defrost food in the microwave (don't leave out on the bench).
- Cool leftover food from a meal quickly, in the fridge, not on the bench.
- Keep hot foods hot (above 60 degrees C— *boiling point is 100 degrees C*)
- Keep cold foods cold. (below 5 degrees C) Your fridge should be between 1-4 degrees C, a fridge thermometer will help check this).
- Freezer temperature should be minus 18 degrees C.
- After using fresh foods (i.e. milk, cheese etc) put all remaining cold foods straight back into the fridge.
- Ensure food is fresh, use before the used-by date.
- Eat left overs within 24 hours and reheat foods to steaming hot. Bring to boiling point, or close to it for over 2 minutes.
- Cook all meat, chicken, fish and eggs thoroughly (cook the yolk and white of an egg until hard) .
- Never re-freeze food once it has been thawed.
- These principles apply at home and when eating out.

Note: General Hygiene Tips

Wear gloves when gardening and wash hands afterwards. Avoid contact with cats. Use gloves if handling cat litter, cats can carry Toxoplasmosis, a serious infection that can cause defects or death in your baby.

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Your Menu

At home, freshly cooked and freshly prepared food is best. It's important that you do not eat a food if there is any doubt about its hygienic preparation and/or storage. In addition to this, as shown on the previous pages, certain foods present a naturally high risk of carrying listeria, these foods should be avoided throughout the pregnancy, as listeria presents an equal risk at all stages of pregnancy.



There is no set menu that you need to follow, however the sample menu below is designed to be balanced and may give you some ideas to try out

Sample menu

Breakfast:

Breakfast Cereal (wholegrain if possible) + milk, fruit and/or yoghurt as desired
and /or toast with spread (ie margarine) and topping of your choice

Mid Morning:

fruit or snack see below if required

Lunch:

Sandwich or freshly prepared salad
or soup served hot with bread (wholegrain bread is a great choice)
Your lunch could include ingredients such as spinach, asparagus, tomatoes, leafy salad vegetables. Spinach also makes a great addition to soup. You could add nuts, chick peas or beans to salads or soups.
Meat, chicken or fish could be included in this meal, if you enjoy vegetarian choices a mixture of beans, nuts or seeds with a suitable dairy food is a great combination.

Fresh fruit or a small glass of orange juice

Mid Afternoon:

yoghurt or fruit if required

Evening Meal:

Meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian main course
Freshly cooked vegetables or salad including green leafy vegetables or salad greens. Try to vary vegetable choices, using in season veggies or salad items as well as your regular favourites.
As a quick back up frozen vegetables are also fine.
Serve with potato, rice or pasta as desired

Dessert, yoghurt or fruit

Snacks & Extras:

Milk—daily 250-500ml (2 dairy serves a day are recommended)

Margarine/oil a few teaspoons/day

Treats! Keep foods high in fat, sugar and salt to small amounts occasionally
Low mercury fish choices: 2-3 serves/week ie sardine, salmon, herring, whiting, squid, prawns, anchovies

Limit high mercury fish, *Some fish are naturally high in Mercury limit these to 150g once a fortnight or less ie shark (flake), bill fish, mackerel (if you eat fish regularly seek further information on this—it is still a great food)*