Safe Plates: Healthy Eating for Pregnant Moms

Eating nutritious foods is important during pregnancy. But some foods can carry harmful bacteria and parasites that can make you and your baby sick. It is easy to take steps to protect yourself from food poisoning while nourishing yourself and your baby.

Listeria monocytogenes (Listeria)

Listeria is a bacterium most often found in soft cheeses, unpasteurized milk products, and ready-to-eat or undercooked meat, poultry, or seafood. *Listeria* can grow even in refrigerated foods.

Listeriosis causes mild to severe flu-like symptoms in pregnant women, who can pass the illness to their unborn child. Infection of the fetus can result in miscarriage, premature birth, blood poisoning and birth defects. Listeriosis can be treated with antibiotics.

Toxoplasma gondii (T. gondii)

T. gondii, a parasite carried by cats, can also contaminate food. Most often, toxoplasmosis results from eating undercooked meat and poultry or unwashed fruits and vegetables, from cleaning a litter box, or from handling contaminated soil.

Toxoplasmosis usually causes no symptoms or only mild flu-like conditions in pregnant women, but can be passed to a developing baby, resulting in miscarriage, disability, and retardation. The severity of effects in the fetus can sometimes be reduced with antibiotic treatment.

The Path to Safe Eating During Pregnancy

The following steps can help protect you and your developing baby from listeriosis, toxoplasmosis, and other foodborne hazards. Pregnant women are susceptible to all food poisoning, but *Listeria* and *T. gondii*, pose a particular threat to fetuses.

Wash your hands before preparing food, before meals, after handling raw meats, and after using the bathroom.

Use hot, soapy water, and scrub well.

Avoid cross-contamination.

- Separate raw meat from other food.
- Immediately wash with soap and hot water all knives, cutting boards, and dishes that contact raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Always put cooked foods onto clean plates and use clean utensils.
- Double wrap raw meat and poultry in your refrigerator to prevent juices from dripping onto other foods.

Cook raw meat and poultry until well-done.

- Cook hamburgers and pork to an internal temperature of 160°F, cook steaks to 170°F, and cook chicken to 180°F.
- Do not sample meat while cooking.

Reheat leftovers and ready-toeat foods, like hot dogs and deli meats, until they are steaming.

- Reheat these foods to at least 165°F.
- Do not eat these foods if they cannot be reheated.

- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly under running water.
- 6 Do not eat pâtes.

Do not eat products made from unpasteurized milk.

- Avoid soft cheeses such as Mexican-style, blue-veined, feta, Brie, and Camembert. You can still eat hard cheeses, yogurt, and cream cheese.
- Avoid dishes containing raw eggs and drink only pasteurized juices.

Store and maintain food properly.

- Refrigerate leftovers within two hours. If food is left sitting out, throw it away.
- Cover stored food to keep out all insects, rats, and pets.
- Discard foods past their expiration dates; discard leftovers after a few days.

Further Safety Measures

- Avoid cleaning cat litter boxes. If you do clean the litter box, wear gloves and wash your hands afterwards.
- Wear gloves when gardening and for activities that involve dirt, and wash your hands afterwards.
- Talk to your doctor about Listeria,
 T. gondii, and other food safety matters.
 - If your doctor suspects an infection, he or she can perform a blood antibody test for *Listeria* or *T. gondii*.
 - If you may have eaten hazardous foods, own cats, or have been gardening, you are at greater risk for infection.

Hazardous Foods for Pregnant Moms and Young Children

To assure a safe pregnancy, it is important to avoid these foods, unless they have been thoroughly heated.

- Unpasteurized Milk and Milk products
- ➤ Soft Cheeses (Mexican-style, feta, Brie.Camembert, and blue-veined)
- > Raw Shellfish
- Rare Meat and Poultry
- Pâtes
- ➤ Cold Ready-to-Eat Meats (hot dogs, sausage, ham, bologna, etc.)
- Cold Ready-to-Eat Seafood Products (smoked salmon, etc.)
- > Cold Leftovers
- ➤ Unwashed Fruits and Vegetables
- ➤ Raw Eggs and Raw Egg Products (homemade ice-cream, mayonnaise, eggnog, Caesar salad dressing, raw cookie dough, and raw cake mix)
- ➤ Unpasteurized Fruit Juices and Ciders

For More Information on T. gondii or Listeria's Risks to Pregnancy Contact:

March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation; Resource Center 1-888-MODIMES http://www.modimes.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists 1-800-762-2264 http://www.acog.org

Organization of Teratology Information Services (OTIS); Pregnancy Riskline 1-888-285-3410 http://orpheus-1.ucsd.edu/otis/

United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (202) 720-7943 http://www.fsis.usda.gov

CSPI is a nonprofit health-advocacy organization. The contents of this pamphlet are provided to inform pregnant women, their friends, and family. Personal medical advice should be obtained from a qualified health professional.

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