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Frequently asked questions in pregnancy

What foods should I avoid while I am pregnant?

Raw or lightly cooked eggs: may contain salmonella (a cause of food poisoning). Eggs should be cooked so that the white and yolk are solid. Avoid food containing raw and undercooked eggs.

Fish and Shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet. They are high in protein and omega 3 fatty acids which contribute to heart health and proper growth and development. However, nearly all fish contain traces of mercury. For most people, this is not a health risk. Some fish or shellfish however, contain higher levels of mercury which can effect the unborn baby's or young child's central nervous system. The FDA recommends the following to ensure that you receive the benefits of fish and reduce exposure to harmful levels of mercury.

1. Don't eat shark, swordfish, king mackerel or tilefish. They contain high levels of mercury.
2. Eat up to 12 ounces (or average of 2 meals) per week of a variety of fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury. Ex: shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollock and catfish. Albacore tuna (white) and tuna steaks have more mercury – limit to 6 oz per week.
3. Check local advisories about the safety of fish in local waters. If no advice is available, eat up to 6 ounces per week and don't eat any other fish for the week.

Fish sticks and "fast food" fish are usually made from fish with low levels of mercury and are ok.

Raw or undercooked meat and poultry may contain toxoplasma. Meat and poultry should be cooked thoroughly so there is no trace of pink or blood.

Try to avoid or minimize your intake of junk food. It's unhealthy because of the high levels of fat and sugar. Sugar has calories without providing any other nutrients the body needs and adds to the risk of tooth decay. Most of us eat much more fat than we need.

Is it safe to eat sushi while pregnant?

Probably not. A parasitic infection probably couldn't get through the placental barrier since the placenta is a pretty good filter for blocking out things. But a parasitic infection could cause you liver or gastrointestinal problems that would then affect your baby. Some parasitic infections can lead to anemia or serious malnourishment in the mother or even cause miscarriage. Although the chances of getting a parasitic infection are slim, the consequences are severe enough that you wouldn't want to take the risk. There is also the risk of eating fish that has a marine toxin in it. Bluefish, mackerel, mahi-mahi, and tuna can carry a histamine toxin that can cause flushing, dizziness, and burning of the mouth and throat.

Is it safe to have a drink or two at dinner while I'm pregnant?

Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) was first identified more than 30 years ago and we still don't know a lot about it, including how much alcohol it takes to cause birth defects and why some babies seem to be affected and others don't. We know that women who drink heavily during pregnancy have an increased risk of having a child with this condition. Babies with FAS have a

constellation of severe lifelong problems. They're born smaller, often continue to grow poorly, have physical abnormalities and have learning and behavior problems.

I'm a vegan. Anything special I should do?

A vegan diet can still be a healthy one during pregnancy. It is prudent, however, to assess your intake of vitamin B12, vitamin D, calcium, iron, and zinc; and to monitor your weight gain. Fortified soy milk and breakfast cereals are usually good sources of these key nutrients. You should check the nutrition information labels on soy milk and cereal packages to be sure, however. A multivitamin and mineral supplement can be used if needed. Unless the diagnosis of a specific nutrient deficiency has been made, it is best to use supplements that contain no more than 100 percent of the RDA for pregnancy. Protein intake of vegans is likely adequate if diets follow the Food Guide Pyramid recommendations.

Is it safe to try to lose weight during pregnancy?

No, because if you diet, you starve the fetus as well as yourself. The standard recommendation is to gain 25 to 35 pounds during pregnancy, and even women who are massively obese shouldn't try to lose weight during pregnancy.

Is safe to get the flu shot while I am pregnant?

Yes, pregnant women are advised to have it.

Is it safe to get a TB test during my pregnancy?

Yes! There is no known risk in getting a tuberculosis skin test during pregnancy.

Is it safe for me to exercise during my pregnancy?

Yes, exercising when you're pregnant is good for both you and your baby. The more active and fit you are during pregnancy, the better. Be sensible though, and don't take up something new and strenuous when you're pregnant.

Walking, swimming, low impact aerobics, yoga, pilates and gentle cycling are usually fine. There are often classes such as aquanatal and antenatal exercise classes held in local venues that are adapted and suitable for pregnancy.

Don't exhaust yourself. Anticipate that you may not be quite as energetic as your pregnancy progresses. If in doubt, ask your health care practitioner. You don't want your heart rate to go too high for too long or to exercise so hard that you get overheated. If you're healthy, you generally don't want to raise your heart rate over 140 beats per minute (bpm).

Pregnancy is not the time to start horse riding, roller blading, downhill skiing, scuba diving, circuit training, high impact aerobics or anything else that involves a high degree of balance as the change in your center of gravity and your weight gain increase the risk of injury.

Horseback riding in pregnancy is inadvisable. As an inexperienced rider, you may be in greater danger of falling off even if the riding stables staff ensures that horses used by beginners are as docile as possible. Falling from a horse is the greatest danger and even experienced riders are advised to stop as pregnancy progresses.

Can I travel while I am pregnant?

With a healthy pregnancy, traveling is safe. Most airlines do not allow pregnancy women to fly after 34 weeks, and may require a note from your provider to allow boarding the flight. However, at 36 week and beyond we recommend you do not travel farther than 2 hours away from home.

Wherever you go whether abroad or at home, do take your antenatal notes with you. Should a problem arise it is then easier for other health and doctors and nurse practitioners to see how your pregnancy has been progressing. If your pregnancy is complicated, it may be safer not to travel far from home.

Getting a bit of rest and relaxation is a great idea. It would be sensible to think about your comfort and your health when you're thinking about destinations.

To avoid sickness while you are away, choose somewhere that has high standards of hygiene. The places where you are least likely to get sick are Northern Europe, Eastern Europe, The USA and Canada..

Most vaccinations and anti-malarials are not advisable during pregnancy, which may make it wiser to postpone some destinations until after you've had the baby. Check that any activities you are considering doing are safe during pregnancy.

If you are abroad while you are pregnant make sure you are covered by insurance and check that your cancellation cover is valid for pregnancy related conditions. Countries within the European Union have a reciprocal health care arrangement that entitles you to receive their national health service free of charge. You need an E111 form before you go and you can obtain one at most post offices.

Can I have a spray tan at a salon in pregnancy?

There are no studies suggesting that spray or fake tans are harmful to a pregnant woman or the unborn baby. Most fake tans involve dyeing the top layer of the skin, which does not come in to contact with the baby. Therefore a spray tan should be safe. However it is always recommended to avoid any unnecessary chemicals in pregnancy.

Tanning beds are not recommended. It is recommended to use sunscreen when outdoors.

Can I get in the Jacuzzi in pregnancy?

Jacuzzis/saunas and very hot baths will affect your body temperature and how your blood circulates around your body. It is believed that this in turn can affect how blood flows to your baby. Although there is no evidence that this can cause problems, however, it is usually advised to avoid Jacuzzis/saunas.

Can I use insect repellents in pregnancy?

Insect repellent contains a chemical called DEET (diethyl-3-methyl benzamide) which in high doses is considered harmful to a baby, especially in the early stages. It is safe to use insect repellent that is less than 23% DEET. There are natural alternatives, which contain citronella that is safe to use in pregnancy.

Is it OK to vacuum in pregnancy?

During pregnancy, your pregnancy hormones cause softening of your ligaments and muscles to help your baby to be able to fit through your pelvis. That combined with the change in weight distribution as your tummy gets bigger can mean you may be at increased risk of injury. But if you are not overweight and if you are generally fit, active and healthy it is expected that you should be able to continue to do most household tasks, as long as they don't involve lifting heavy weights or holding awkward postures for minutes at a time.

If you are suffering any back pain or pelvic discomfort, speak to your health care practitioner. If necessary they can refer you to a physiotherapist for advice and treatment.

It is also not advisable to move furniture while you are pregnant.

It is not safe to ride the bumper cars at an amusement park when you are pregnant.

It is not safe to ice skate or roller blade during pregnancy.

Is it safe to color my hair during pregnancy?

Pregnant women should consider waiting until after the first trimester, but after that we leave the decision up to each patient. No one has enough information to guarantee that using chemical dyes on your scalp during pregnancy is completely safe. That said, there's no evidence that using these dyes every month or two will cause birth defects, either.

Over the years, people have conducted animal studies trying to shed light on this matter. Some, but not all, studies have shown a few of the chemical compounds in hair dyes to be teratogenic (meaning they can cause birth defects). However, in many cases, the animals were exposed to extremely high doses of these chemicals, doses that far exceed the amount a woman would receive from coloring her hair every month or two. Clearly, the chemicals in both permanent and semi-permanent hair dyes are not highly toxic. However, no one knows for sure whether low-level exposures are risky.

Is it safe to wear artificial nails during pregnancy?

Consider the risks before you take the plunge! They can cause infections and severely weaken your natural nail. It is best to avoid any unneeded chemicals during pregnancy.

Is it safe to get a tattoo during pregnancy?

Tattoos are not recommended during pregnancy. First of all, your skin changes during pregnancy and that may change the way the tattoo looks after you deliver the baby. In addition, if the equipment is not properly sterilized, there's always the risk of transmission of blood-borne infections such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV.

Can I get my teeth cleaned? What if I have a cavity?

Yes. You may go to the dentist to have your teeth cleaned. It is also safe to have many common dental procedures done during pregnancy. Your dentist should know that a local anesthetic without the use of epinephrine is safe in pregnancy. Unnecessary x-rays are discouraged for pregnant women. However, if you must have an x-ray while you are pregnant, rest assured that the risk to your unborn baby is considered minimal, since your uterus is shielded by a lead apron and the amount of radiation that scatters during the x-ray and passes through parts of your body not covered by the apron is negligible. So, if you develop a dental condition that requires an x-ray and not having one poses a risk to your health, go ahead and have it. Whitening treatments should be avoided completely.

Can my depression harm the baby while I'm pregnant?

Make sure that depression and treatment are discussed with your healthcare provider. If you have mild to moderate depression, start with psychotherapy. If depression is keeping you from doing what you need to do, or making you suffer, you may need medication. Antidepressants for the mother don't seem to have lasting effects on the baby, but new information is coming out every month. Remember that untreated depression has serious risks of its own --- risks that continue after the baby is born, making it more difficult for you to attach to your baby, enjoy her, and smile at her, and depriving you of the joy of motherhood.

Is it safe to change the cat's litter box when I'm pregnant?

No. The danger is toxoplasmosis, a parasitic infection carried by cats, transmitted in cat feces, and found in gardens where cats poop. If you get toxoplasmosis for the first time when you're pregnant, the baby can get it, too, in utero, and that can cause significant neurological damage. So if you know you've never had toxoplasmosis and have cats, you shouldn't change the litter box and you'll want to be careful about gardening. (Use gloves and a mask if you have to do these things.) If you're not sure whether you've had toxoplasmosis, you can get your blood tested to see whether you've been exposed. If you have been, you don't need to worry about it.

Is it safe to give blood during pregnancy?

No. The amount of blood in your body increases by about 50 percent when you're pregnant because you need more of it circulating to your placenta and baby. When you give blood, you reduce the amount of oxygen that your blood can carry to your baby. No blood bank would consider drawing blood from a pregnant woman. (Don't worry if you gave blood before you knew

you were pregnant, though. Your healthcare provider will check your blood for anemia and recommend iron supplements if needed.

Is it safe to sleep on my back during pregnancy?

Sleeping on your back is safe during your first trimester, especially if you're healthy and your pregnancy is normal. Once you hit about 20 weeks, lying on your back can cause your uterus to press on the inferior vena cava (a major vein that returns blood from your lower body to your heart), resulting in dizziness, low blood pressure, and a possible reduction in blood flow to your uterus. As your pregnancy progresses, try to lie on one side or the other, and support your hip with a pillow. This allows for better blood flow to your developing baby.

If you awake finding yourself on your back – DO NOT PANIC- just reposition yourself.

Is it safe to take sleeping pills during pregnancy?

There is limited data on the effects of sleeping pills on the fetus. If you absolutely need to take something, the medication, containing the antihistamine doxylamine (like Unisom SleepTabs) has been widely used in pregnancy. Doxylamine has strong sedative effects, and there's no evidence that it causes any harm when taken as advised during the first trimester. Discuss with your provider.

What can I do about varicose veins?

Standing for long periods can also make you more susceptible. The good news is that varicose veins tend to improve after you give birth. Make sure you exercise daily. Elevate your feet and legs when possible. When sitting do not cross your legs and use a stool to rest your legs. Wear special support hose, or compression stockings. They are available at medical supply stores and pharmacies.

Varicose veins are generally not serious. However if you notice the surrounding area becoming red, hot, tender, and the vein feels rope-like, be sure to call your practitioner.

For more information here are some helpful websites:

www.babycenter.com

www.americanbaby.com

www.webmd.com

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