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Pregnancy Care

Congratulations on your pregnancy and the impending arrival of your new addition! Now is the time more than ever to look after yourself and your growing baby.

Diet & Supplements:

Pregnant women need more protein, iron, folate and iodine, but only a small increase in energy (kilojoules). Folic acid supplements before and after conception can reduce the risk of neural tube defects such as spina bifida. Small regular snacks may help nausea or morning sickness. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy may affect your unborn baby and therefore not recommended.

Listeria infection, or listeriosis, is an illness usually caused by eating food contaminated with bacteria known as *Listeria monocytogenes*. Healthy people may experience no ill-effects from listeria infection at all, but the risks are substantial for pregnant women. The greatest danger is to the unborn baby, with increased risk of miscarriage, stillbirth or premature labour. A listeria infection is easily treated with antibiotics, but prevention is best.

Some foods are more prone to contamination with listeria than others and should be avoided if you are pregnant. They include:

- soft cheeses, such as brie, camembert and ricotta – these are safe if served cooked and hot
- precooked or pre-prepared cold foods that will not be reheated – for example, pre-prepared salads, pate, quiches and delicatessen meats like ham and salami
- raw seafood such as oysters and sashimi or smoked seafood such as salmon (canned varieties are safe)
- unpasteurised foods
- soft-serve ice cream.

The organism that causes listeria infection is destroyed by heat, so properly cooked foods are not a risk.

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Salmonella is a cause of food poisoning that can trigger miscarriage. The most likely sources of salmonella are raw eggs and undercooked meat and poultry.

Good food hygiene

Good food hygiene is the best way to reduce the risk of salmonella and listeria infections. Suggestions include:

- Always wash your hands before and after preparing food.
- Keep your kitchen surfaces clean.
- Do not let uncooked food contaminate cooked food.
- Wash fruit, vegetables and salad before eating.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Keep pets away from kitchen surfaces.
- Wear rubber gloves when handling cat litter trays or gardening.
- Store food at correct temperatures.

Mercury in fish

It is suggested that pregnant women eat two to three serves of fish every week for the good health of themselves and their developing baby.

However, pregnant women or women intending to become pregnant within the next six months should be careful about which fish they eat. Some types of fish contain high levels of mercury, which can be harmful to the developing fetus.

Pregnant women should:

- **limit to one serve (150 g) per fortnight** – billfish (swordfish, broadbill and marlin) and shark (flake), with no other fish eaten in that fortnight
- **limit to one serve (150 g) per week** – orange roughy (deep sea perch) or catfish, with no other fish eaten that week
- **eat two to three serves per week** – of any other fish or seafood (for example, salmon or tuna).

Note: 150 g is equivalent to approximately two frozen crumbed fish portions.

Women should not be worried if they've had the odd meal of fish with high levels of mercury. It is only a potential problem when that type of fish is eaten regularly, which causes a build up of mercury in the mother's blood.

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Antenatal visits and routine tests during pregnancy

The maternal serum screening test (MSS) is a blood test available to pregnant women in the first or second trimester of pregnancy. The test can identify if you are at increased risk of having a baby with Down syndrome, Edward syndrome or neural tube defects such as spina bifida.

Antenatal care includes regular medical visits, screening tests, and diagnostic tests to help assess your health status to keep you and your baby in a healthy condition during your pregnancy.

There are several antenatal tests to assess development of the baby in your womb. Antenatal tests are done at a stipulated time beginning from 8-10 weeks of gestation through 20 weeks. Prior to a test, counselling is available which will assist you in deciding the type of test based on advantages and disadvantages of each.

Antenatal screening tests such as ultrasound, first trimester and second trimester screening are done to determine whether your baby is at any risk of having a particular genetic condition such as Down's syndrome or other abnormalities.

General health & fitness

It is advised to maintain a healthy weight during your pregnancy, as there are increased risks if you are over or under weight.

Regular physical activity provides many health and social benefits and may also help manage some symptoms of pregnancy. Unless you have complications, it should be possible to enjoy some level of physical activity throughout most of your pregnancy. Consult with your doctor, physiotherapist or healthcare professional before starting any new exercise program.