

What is Listeria in pregnancy

You can get a listeria infection from eating contaminated food. The listeria bacteria are found in nature and in some foods. Listeria is not a new disease but it's only over the last ten years that it's been widely recognised that the bacteria can be transmitted through food. While listeria infection is uncommon and causes few or no symptoms in healthy people, it can be very dangerous. If you get a listeria infection during your pregnancy, there is a high risk that it will be transmitted to your unborn child. Listeria infection of the fetus can lead to miscarriage, still birth, premature birth or can make a newborn baby very ill.

Prevention is better than cure

It's important you reduce the risk of contracting this infection during your pregnancy. You can do this by taking simple food hygiene steps at home, being careful about what you eat when eating out, and avoiding certain foods at higher risk of listeria contamination .

How you can reduce the risk of listeria during pregnancy

For the health of you and your baby during pregnancy, it is important that you select a nutritious diet from a wide variety of foods such as vegetables, fruit, dairy foods, bread, cereals, pasta, lean meat, fish, eggs and nuts. However, you should eat freshly cooked or freshly prepared food only. It's important that you do not eat food where there is any doubt about it's hygienic preparation and/or storage. Avoid eating foods during pregnancy which could contain listeria.

These are mostly chilled, ready-to-eat foods including:

- soft cheese such as brie, camembert and ricotta (these are safe if cooked and served hot)
- takeaway cooked diced chicken (as used in chicken sandwiches)
- cold meats
- pate
- pre-prepared or stored salads
- raw seafood (such as oysters and sashimi)
- smoked seafood such as smoked salmon, smoked oysters (canned are safe)

Other precautions

Listeria is destroyed by conventional cooking, so freshly cooked foods are safe to eat. However, listeria is one of the few bacteria that will grow in refrigerated foods. This is why chilled ready-to-eat foods and refrigerated foods should be avoided. Do not eat food that has been prepared and then stored in a refrigerator for more than 12 hours. It's best not to use salad bars in restaurants, supermarkets or delicatessens. Refrigerated foods that are past their 'use by' or 'best before' dates should also not be eaten.

Make sure it's really hot

If you buy ready-to-eat, hot food, make sure it's served steaming hot. When reheating food in the microwave at home, make sure it's steaming hot throughout.

Eating out

Only eat food that is served hot. Do not eat food that is served lukewarm. It is best to avoid buffet meals. If this isn't possible, choose the hot foods only. Avoid pre-prepared salads.

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Good food hygiene

- Take some simple food hygiene steps to reduce the risk of listeria infection and other food-borne illnesses.
- Always thaw ready-to-eat frozen food in the fridge or microwave —don't thaw at room temperature.
- Keep raw meat covered and separate from cooked food and ready-to-eat food.
- Always store raw meat below other food in the refrigerator to prevent it dripping onto food.
- Wash hands, knives and cutting boards after handling raw food to avoid cross contamination of cooked and ready-to-eat food.
- Thoroughly cook all raw food of animal origin.
- Keep hot food hot (above 60°C) and cold foods cold (at or below 5°C).
- Don't let cooked foods cool down on the bench. Put in the fridge after the steam has gone.
- Thoroughly reheat food until steaming hot.
- Avoid unpasteurised milk or food made from unpasteurised milk.

A guide to foods which are safe and those at 'higher risk' of listeria contamination

FOOD TYPE	SAFE/AVOID	PRECAUTIONS
Canned Meat & Fish	Safe	Once opened store in fridge, use within 12 hours.
Cheese		
Soft cheese such as brie, camembert and ricotta	AVOID	
Spreads and processed cheese	Safe	Ensure packaging is intact.
Hard yellow cheese	Safe	Store in fridge.
Cold meats (Roast or boiled)		
Ready cooked (from supermarket, sandwich bars, etc)	AVOID	
Home cooked	Safe	Use within 12 hours of cooking or freeze. Unused portions can be thawed in the fridge. Use immediately.
Chicken		
Home cooked	Safe	Cook thoroughly. Use immediately or store in fridge and use within 12 hours.
Hot take-away chicken	Safe	Make sure it's steaming hot when you buy it. Use immediately or store in fridge and use within 12 hours.
Ready cooked, cold (whole or sliced)	AVOID	
Pate		
Ready-made (packaged or loose)	AVOID	
Salads		
Ready-made (from salad bars, packaged, etc)	AVOID	
Home-made	Safe	Wash all vegetables thoroughly. Store in fridge, use within 12 hours.
Salad Dressings	Safe	Store opened containers in the fridge.
Seafood		
Raw (oysters, sashimi or sushi)	AVOID	
Smoked (chilled or frozen)	AVOID	

LISTERIA & PREGNANCY



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