

Newhart Orthodontics

What to Avoid and What to Embrace During Pregnancy

Well-meaning friends, relatives and even strangers like to tell you just what you can and can't do while you're expecting. How do you know what to believe? Your Ob-Gyn is probably the best source of information, however it always best to educate yourself as well.

Here, from organizations such as the March of Dimes, the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency and a specialist in obstetrics who has written a book on pregnancy dos and don'ts, is a general list of what you can do or have and what you should avoid during pregnancy.



I. Consider Avoiding

- a. **Alcohol, cigarettes and illegal drugs** – The use of any of these during pregnancy has been linked to premature birth, low birth weight and serious birth defects. No amount has been determined as safe.
- b. **Cat litter** – This can contain a parasite called *Toxoplasmosis gondii*, which causes Toxoplasmosis, a disease that can be fatal to your fetus. Have someone else change your cat's litter box; if you must do it, wash your hands thoroughly. You should also wash up after handling your cat or gardening, and wear gloves when handling raw meat.
- c. **Deli meats and salads** – Cold cuts, and tuna or egg salad from a deli can also be contaminated with *Listeria* bacteria. Elisabeth Aron, M.D. author of *Pregnancy Dos & Don'ts*, cautions against eating deli meats and hot dogs unless they've been reheated and are steaming hot.
- d. **Certain large fish** – Shark, swordfish, tilefish and king mackerel are all known to contain high levels of methyl mercury (thanks to industrial pollution in ponds, lakes and oceans). Mercury can damage the nervous system. Visit the EPA's Web site (www.epa.gov/ost/fish) for more information on risky seafood in different regions of the country.
- e. **Over-the-counter medications** – Limit these to remedies considered safe throughout pregnancy, including the pain reliever acetaminophen (Tylenol), antihistamines like Claritin, Zyrtec and Allegra, many antacids and prescribed narcotic pain relievers. Pain relievers like aspirin and those containing ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, etc.), and the diarrhea medicine Pepto Bismol should be avoided because of their link to birth defects. Always check with your doctor before taking any medicine to be sure that it's safe for you.
- f. **Raw or undercooked meat, fish, eggs, and unpasteurized milk** – These foods can carry salmonella and *E. coli*, which can make you sick and harm your fetus. Don't eat any eggs with a runny yolk, and cook beef to at least 160° F.

- g. **Saunas and hot tubs** – Studies have linked elevated body temperatures (102°F) to neural tube defects and miscarriages. (Also, be cautious with electric blankets, particularly during the first trimester.)

II. Consider Limiting

- a. **Caffeine** – Limit your intake to less than 300 milligrams a day (about two cups of coffee). Look into the amount of caffeine in your favorite beverages and foods; it can vary, according to Aron. One 8-ounce cup of coffee can contain anywhere from 57 to 350 milligrams; an 8-ounce cup of tea, up to 100 milligrams; a 12-ounce can of cola, up to 100 milligrams; a chocolate bar, about 30 milligrams; and a single espresso or cappuccino, about 100 milligrams.
- b. **Hair dyes** – Studies have not shown hair dyes to be harmful to a fetus, but the FDA recommends being careful if you're pregnant. Researchers have found that low levels of the dye can be absorbed into the skin and excreted into the urine. Limit use of hair dye to after your first trimester, Aron advises, and use techniques that shorten your exposure to the dye.
- c. **Soft cheeses** – Limit your intake to soft domestic cheeses made with pasteurized milk. Otherwise, avoid cheeses such as brie, camembert, Roquefort, feta, gorgonzola, as well as Mexican style queso blanco and queso fresco. These may contain the Listeria bacteria, which can cause miscarriage.

III. Consider Embracing

- a. **Exercise** – Thirty minutes per day will help you maintain weight, improve your fitness and reduce your stress. But steer clear of hockey, soccer and basketball (which have an abdominal trauma risk); skiing, horseback riding and gymnastics (which have a falling risk) and scuba diving (which has a decompression syndrome risk). Good choices include walking, swimming, yoga and pregnancy exercise classes. Contact your doctor if you experience dizziness, pain, contractions or vaginal bleeding during or after exercise.
- b. **Massage** – One recent study found that pregnant women who had a massage two times per week for five weeks experienced lower anxiety and stress levels, less back pain and better sleep patterns, according to Aron.
- c. **Air Travel** – Flying is generally safe during pregnancy, although some physicians caution against doing during your last month of pregnancy (if you went into labor, you probably wouldn't have access to medical care). Just keep well hydrated and walk around the cabin every one or two hours to avoid any potential blood clotting.
- d. **Sexual Intercourse** – It's perfectly safe at any time during pregnancy.

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