

# Navigating the Holiday Menu during Pregnancy

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Holiday festivities sometimes include eating foods and drinks that might not be part of our everyday diet. During pregnancy and breastfeeding, we need to give a little more thought to what we should eat and drink. “Is it ok for the baby?” often goes through our minds during these times. As a teratogen information specialist at MotherToBaby who answers a lot of the questions we get via our texting service (855-999-3525), these types of questions ramp up during this time of year! So, here’s some insight...

## *Popular Holiday Food & Drinks*

### **Eggnog & Other Holiday Beverages**

Eggnog seems to be a part of many holiday parties. Always be sure to check if the eggnog is homemade or not. Does it contain raw eggs, which can carry bacteria such as **salmonella**? If the eggnog was commercially made and packaged, then usually the eggs have been pasteurized, and the product may even have been heated prior to packaging. Also, always remember to check if the eggnog contains a little “holiday cheer” (i.e., alcohol) or not. It is common to add rum to eggnog, and we want to avoid **alcohol** when pregnant or breastfeeding (see our **Alcohol Fact Sheet** for more info). Other common holiday beverages include mulled wine, wassail, hot buttered rum, and of course wine and champagne. All of these contain alcohol as well, so it is best to avoid them and just stick with mocktails and non-alcoholic punch.

### **Smoked Salmon & Fruit**

“Smoked salmon tastes wonderful on crackers with cream cheese! But is it ok during pregnancy?” one woman texted me. Here’s what I told her. Smoked salmon is still considered **raw fish** as it is cured rather than cooked, so should be avoided during pregnancy due to the risk of foodborne illnesses. If the salmon has been heated to steaming, any concern for bacteria has been reduced. See our **Fact Sheet** on Eating Raw, Undercooked, or Cold Meats and Seafood for more info. Sometimes you will find foods that contain meats that have been dried, such as beef jerky. Although beef jerky is high in salt, there are not any other known risks to eating this tasty food during pregnancy.

“What about a fruit plate containing papaya and pineapple? Are there some worries about eating those fruits during pregnancy?” another texter wrote. Both fruits do contain enzymes that have been thought to induce labor. Papaya contains papain, while pineapple contains bromelain. Yet when eaten at normal levels (not daily!), these delicious fruits have not been shown to have any negative effect on a pregnancy. Of course, we hope the fruit has been **well-washed** before cutting and serving!

### **Eggplant Parmesan**

“When the main dish is served, can we enjoy the amazing eggplant parmesan? Or what about eggplant ratatouille?”

Eggplant is low in calories and high in fiber. Do avoid eating it raw, but cooked eggplant can be an occasional part of your diet. The concern is that eggplant is part of the Nightshade family and contains alkaloids in the leaves and tubers that can be toxic. But eating the fruit alone has not been shown to have any risks during pregnancy, especially when cooked.

## Tiramisu

“Will rounding out our holiday meal with a delicious dessert such as tiramisu need to wait until after pregnancy and breastfeeding?” Traditional tiramisu contains two forms of alcohol, both Marsala wine and rum. Plus, liberal amounts of caffeine in the form of coffee and espresso. We have already mentioned that alcohol should be avoided if pregnant or breastfeeding, but what about the caffeine? Low to moderate levels of **caffeine use** (200 to 300 mg per day) has not been shown to increase any risks during pregnancy. See our **Caffeine Fact Sheet** for more info.

Who knew that holiday menus could need extra thought and consideration during pregnancy and breastfeeding?! Plus, with the added stress of COVID-19 this year, and the warnings to avoid large gatherings, you may have even more questions now than ever. Hopefully, this information will equip you to sit back, relax, and enjoy the festivities!

**Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at [MotherToBaby.org](https://www.MotherToBaby.org).**

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