



Lead Poisoning

How Nutrition Can Help

Lexington-Fayette County Health Department

What is Lead?

Lead is a metal that is very toxic. It can be found in the paint or plumbing of old homes, dust particles in the air, bare soil or food. This type of lead is very small and invisible to the naked eye. The US banned it from use in plumbing in 1986, but it could still be present in an older home. It could also still be in water service lines and therefore can be in drinking water.

Lead is more likely to dissolve in hot water and the longer water stands in the pipe. Do not use hot tap water to mix infant formula or baby food.

What does it do?

When lead enters the blood stream, it can cause a variety of health problems for children and adults.

Even a lead-containing dust particle the size of a grain of salt can be very dangerous.

Children under the age of six are the most effected by lead poisoning. Even low levels may cause decreased brain development, attention deficit disorders, hearing problems, stunted growth or kidney damage in children. High levels can cause death.

In adults, lead can increase blood pressure, cause irritability, memory problems, fertility problems, muscle or joint pain and nerve disorders. Long term exposure is linked to seizures, stroke, kidney disease, cancer and even death.

Sometimes people with lead poisoning show no symptoms, but possible signs of lead poisoning include:

- Abdominal pain
- Anemia
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Hearing loss
- Kidney damage
- Nerve damage (especially in wrists)
- Sleep problems
- Dental and bone problems

Am I at Risk?

A risk factor is something that increases your chance of getting a disease or condition. Risk factors for lead poisoning include:

- Working in an industry that processes lead
- Being a child age six or younger
- Living in a house or apartment built before 1978
- Living in neighborhoods where homes were built before 1978

How can Nutrition Help?

People who are at risk for lead poisoning have also been shown to be at risk for malnutrition. Eating a diet rich in the following vitamins and minerals can help to prevent lead poisoning as well as other nutritional risk factors. *Programs*



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such as WIC (Women, Infant and Children's Nutrition Program) can help to provide healthy foods.

Calcium

Provide two servings per day of dairy products or other calcium-rich foods. Foods with calcium include:

- Milk
- Cheese
- Spinach
- Salmon
- Peanuts
- Yogurt
- Turnip greens
- Sardines
- Tofu

Iron

Provide one serving of an iron rich food per day to children ages 6 months and up. Foods with iron include: (as always, cut foods to an appropriate size for young children)

- Lean red meat or ham
- Eggs
- Skinless chicken or turkey
- Oatmeal
- Split peas, lentils or beans
- Raisins, dates or prunes
- Wheat germ
- Collard greens and kale

Vitamin C

Provide two servings of fruits per day. One of these servings may be in the form of 100% fruit juice. Foods with vitamin C include:

- Kiwi fruit
- Grapefruit
- Bell peppers
- Strawberries
- Broccoli
- Oranges
- Tomatoes
- Fruit juice
- Collard greens

Zinc

Foods with zinc include:

- Lean beef
- Clams
- Sunflower seeds
- Oysters
- Cashews
- Brewer's yeast

For more information about lead poisoning, contact these organizations:

- National Safety Council at www.nsc.org
- EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791
- Lead Listing at <http://www.leadlisting.org>

Other Nutrition Tips

- **Do not skip meals.**
An empty stomach allows your body to absorb more lead. It is best to eat three meals and one or two snacks as needed daily, including many of the healthy foods listed.
- **Limit foods high in fat.**
Fatty foods allow the body to absorb lead faster. Fatty foods include fried foods, fast foods, meat that has not been trimmed of fat, chicken skin, potato chips, cupcakes, donuts, bacon, butter and lard.
- **Always wash your hands before eating.**
- **Only use vitamin and mineral supplements under the supervision of a physician or registered dietitian.**

Notes