

Pica and Pregnancy

You may be exposing yourself and your child to lead

What is Pica?

Pica is an eating disorder in which a person eats non-food items. These items can be dirt, paint chips, clay, or pottery.

There's No Single Cause of Pica

Pica might happen when your body runs low on certain minerals and nutrients (often iron and zinc). Pica can happen at any time, to anyone, and women can develop pica during pregnancy. Sometimes, pica is a part of a person's cultural practices. You might view pica as a normal practice if you have seen someone else do it.

Eating Non-Food Items Puts You and Your Unborn Child at Risk

Eating non-food items can expose you to toxic particles like lead. Lead can pass from a mother to her unborn baby.

Lead poisoning is when a person's health or body functions are negatively affected by lead contamination in what they eat, drink, touch, or breathe. There is no safe level of lead a person can have. While there are many sources of lead, lead poisoning is 100% preventable.



Pica can put you, and your child, at risk for lead poisoning.

You may not know if non-food items have lead in them

Non-food items like soil, pottery pieces, clay, and paint can contain lead. If you live in a home built before 1978, there is a chance the paint and soil around your home contains lead. Certain pottery can have lead in the glaze, or in the bright, painted designs. Clay can contain lead as well. Eating these items increases your risk of lead poisoning.

Symptoms alone do not determine if you have lead poisoning. A person with lead poisoning may feel fine. If symptoms do occur, you may confuse them for other conditions. The symptoms of lead poisoning include headaches, nausea, trouble concentrating, and fatigue.

Lead poisoning can affect the health of your child, and yourself

Lead poisoning puts pregnant women at risk of miscarriage, high blood pressure, and preterm labor.

Lead poisoning can affect your unborn child. They are at risk of low birthweight and altered brain development. Lead poisoning can also affect a child's kidneys and nervous system. As they grow, they are at risk of behavioral and learning problems.

Lead poisoning can be prevented, even if you have pica

- Talk to your medical provider about your cravings. Your provider is trained to help you and provide support.
- Ask your medical provider for a blood lead test. The only way to confirm lead exposure is through a blood test.
- Find food alternatives for your cravings.
- Eat a diet rich in vitamin C, iron, and calcium. This can prevent lead from absorbing into your body. It can also prevent it from passing to your unborn child.