



Health advice to pregnant women and lactating mothers affected by elevated lead level in drinking water



Health effects of lead on pregnant women and lactating mothers:

- Lead exists naturally in our environment. Lead can enter the human body by ingestion, inhalation and skin absorption. When lead is absorbed in excessive amount reflected by a raised blood lead level, it may be toxic to the body. Depending on the lead level inside the body, significant exposure may result in neurodevelopmental effects, anaemia, high blood pressure, gastrointestinal symptoms, impaired renal function, neurological impairment, etc.
- During pregnancy, high blood lead level may increase the risk of miscarriage. Pregnant women and lactating mothers can take a blood test for lead level, which is to be arranged by the Department of Health, to assess any potential health risks. Seek medical advice promptly if you have any symptoms or physical discomfort.
- Lead may be found in our living environment and household items. Pregnant women and lactating mothers should take immediate actions to minimise their exposure to lead from foods and environment. These help lower the blood lead level as lead is gradually excreted in urine and bile.
- Lactating mothers can continue breastfeeding:

Mothers' blood lead level may increase after exposure to lead. However, lead level in breastmilk should be far lower than that in blood. Mothers do not have to stop breastfeeding. Breastfeeding mothers are advised to take a blood test to find out blood lead level.

Breastfeeding is unlikely to raise baby's blood lead level if mother's blood lead level is only slightly higher than normal. Unless breastfeeding mother's blood lead level is very high (40 microgram/dL or above), the mother can continue to breastfeed and let her baby gain the benefit of breastmilk.

How pregnant and lactating women can reduce the lead exposure from food and environment:



1. Use a safe water source:

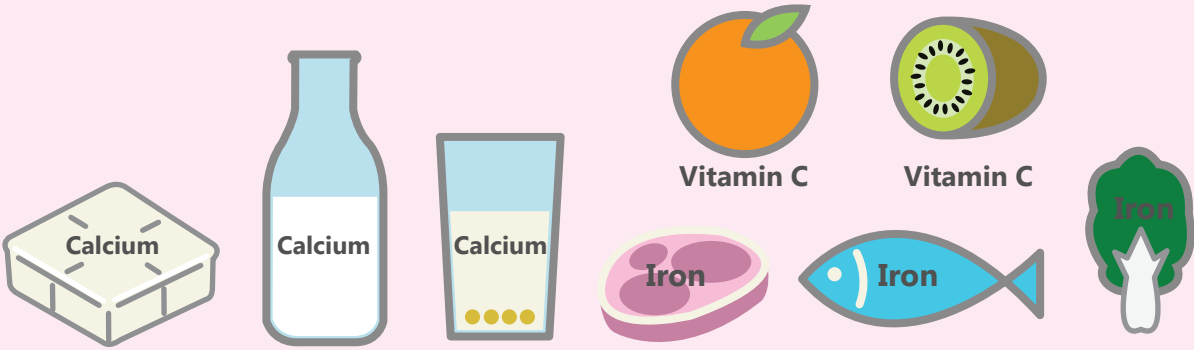
- Use alternative sources such as bottled distilled water for cooking and drinking.





2. Take a balanced diet to ensure adequate nutritional intake:

- Sufficient dietary intake of calcium, iron and vitamin C can help minimise lead absorption. Food sources of calcium include milk, tofu, and calcium-fortified soymilk. Meat, fish, and dark green leafy vegetables are rich in iron. Fresh fruits such as orange and kiwifruits are good sources of vitamin C.

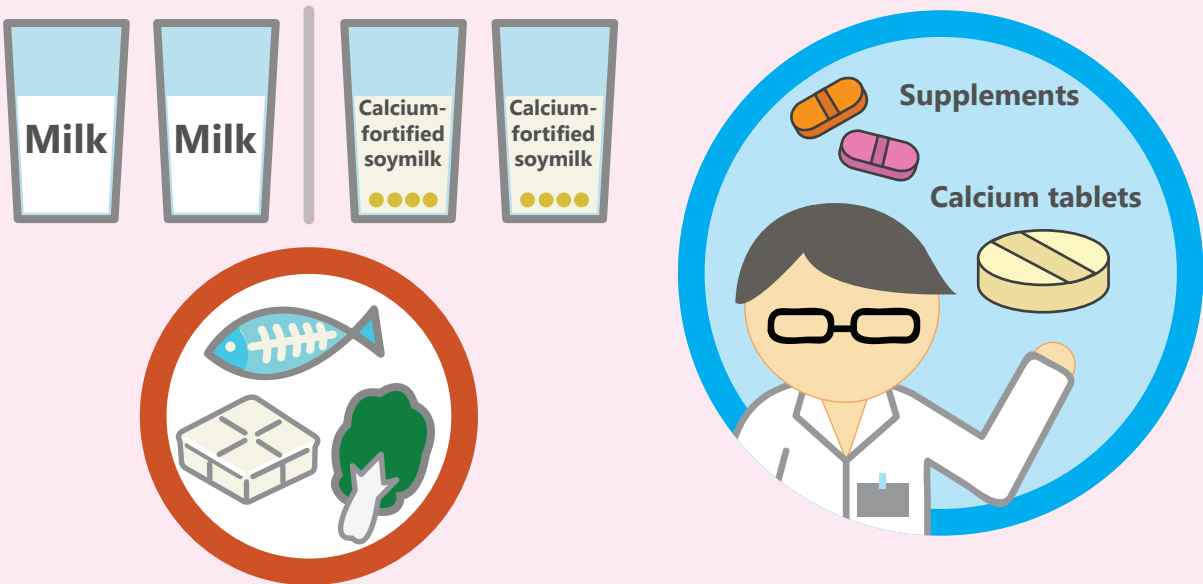


- Include iron-rich foods in your diet. Consuming vitamin C rich fruit with meals helps the body absorb iron from other foods.



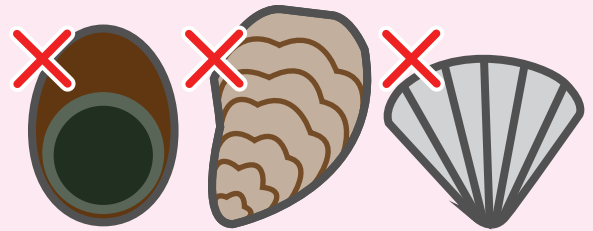
- A higher calcium intake helps lower blood lead levels in pregnant women and lactating mothers who are exposed to lead. Consume two glasses of milk or calcium-fortified soymilk every day; also choose calcium-rich foods, such as tofu, small fish eaten with their bones, green leafy vegetables. You may need to take both the prenatal multivitamin and minerals supplement and calcium tablet. Seek advice from your doctor or pharmacist.

Daily



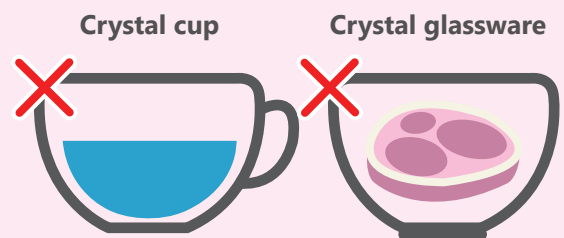
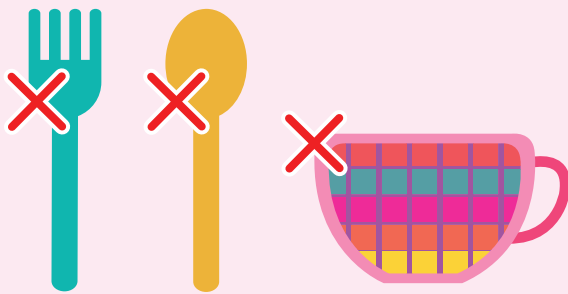
3. Ensure food safety:

- Before cooking, soak and wash vegetables thoroughly, particularly leafy vegetables, to remove dust and soil in order to reduce the level of lead.
- Reduce the consumption of foods high in lead, such as lime preserved egg, oyster, and shellfish.



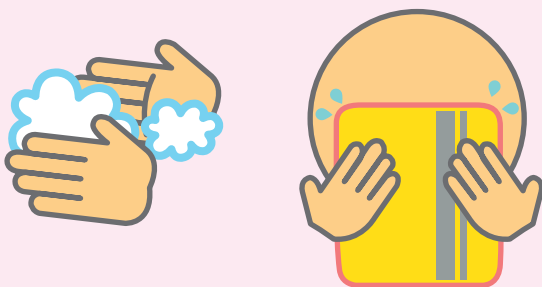
4. Ensure tableware safety:

- Refrain from using colour painted ceramic tableware and cups unless the item is labelled “lead-free” or you are certain that material used is safe.
- Do not store foods and drinks in crystal glassware.

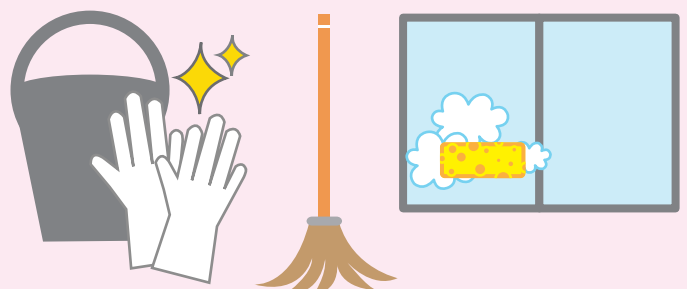


5. Keep home clean and maintain good personal hygiene:

- Wash your hands and clean your face frequently to remove the lead dust on skin.
- Do not smoke.



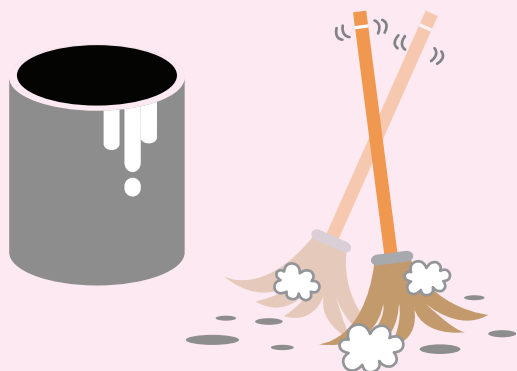
- Remove dust in the household. Mop floors frequently, and use damp cloths or sponge to clean windowsills and furniture.



6.

Avoid handling items that may contain lead, these include:

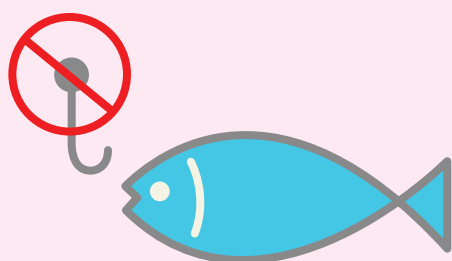
- Some paints may contain lead. Fix the deteriorating paints.



- Hair dye, skin care products and cosmetics of unknown origin, eye shadows known as Kohl and Surma from Arabia, Middle East, and South Asia.

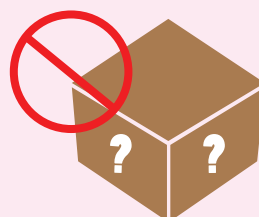


- Fishing sinker.

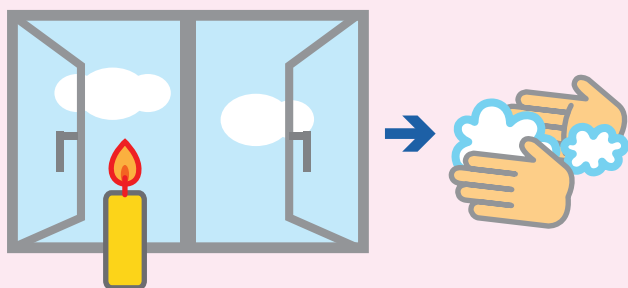


- Chinese herbal medicine or proprietary Chinese medicine of unknown origin.

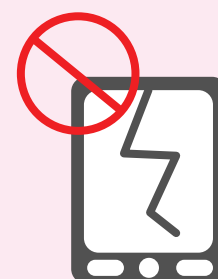
Proprietary Chinese medicine



- Ensure good ventilation when using candles and burning incense and wash your hands immediately after handling.



- Damaged batteries and electronic devices.



- Advise family members, who are exposed to lead and lead compound at work, to change their clothes and take off their shoes before entering home.

