

Pica during Pregnancy

What is Pica?

Pica is the cravings and practice of consuming non-food substances.

Some examples:

- ◆ Clay or Dirt
- ◆ Laundry Starch
- ◆ Coffee grounds
- ◆ Cigarette ashes
- ◆ Lead paint
- ◆ Gravel
- ◆ Paper
- ◆ Soap/Toothpaste

Sometimes excessive amounts of certain foods that are low in nutritional value are also eaten and can be considered Pica.

Some examples:

- ◆ Cornstarch
- ◆ Ice

Who gets Pica?

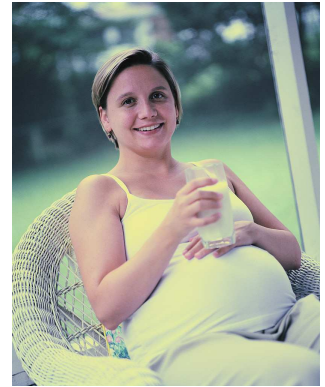
- Pica is usually found in pregnant women, infants, or children
- Pregnant teens are more prone to Pica because their dietary intake is often low in key nutrients like calcium and iron.

Why do people eat things that are not food?

The specific causes of pica are unknown, but certain conditions and situations can increase a person's risk for pica:

nutritional deficiencies, such as iron or zinc, that may trigger specific cravings (however, the nonfood items craved usually don't supply the minerals lacking in the person's body)

cultural factors — in families, religions, or groups in which eating nonfood substances is a learned practice



pregnancy, but it's been suggested that pica during pregnancy occurs more frequently in women who exhibited similar practices during their childhood or before pregnancy or who have a history of pica in their family

The Dangers of Pica

Anyone who consumes nonfood items may be at risk for serious health problems, including:

- lead poisoning (from eating paint chips in older buildings with lead-based paint)
- bowel problems (from consuming indigestible substances like hair, cloth, etc.)
- intestinal obstruction or perforation (from eating objects that could get lodged in the intestines)
- dental injury (from eating hard substances that could harm the teeth)
- parasitic infections (from eating dirt or feces)

When to Call the Doctor



If you find your self craving or eating non-food substances, please tell your doctor.

Your doctor will help you manage and prevent pica-related behaviors, educating you about acceptable and unacceptable food substances. Your doctor may also check for anemia or other nutritional deficiencies.

Fortunately, pica is usually a temporary condition that improves following pregnancy.

For more information:

<http://pregnancy.about.com/cs/nutritioninpregn/a/aa011100a.htm>

<http://www.pregnancy-info.net/pica.html>