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# Amount of PCBs in human milk won't harm infant

**Q: I HAVE A FRIEND who claims that the amount of PCBs in human milk nowadays may mean that we are doing our babies more harm than good by breast-feeding. Is that true?**

A.: While PCBs—polychlorinated biphenyls—are now recognized as undesirable environmental contaminants and considerable effort is being directed toward limiting the amount that finds its way into our food supply, there is no reason at the moment to think that the amount generally found in human milk is harmful to the nursing infant.

In a recent statement on PCBs in breast milk, the Committee on Environmental Hazards of the American Academy of Pediatrics said PCBs are of concern in the U.S. only to women who have worked with the chemical or who eat extra large amounts of sports fish from PCB-contaminated waters. (In the past, many foods have been sources of contamination, but more recently, contaminated game fish has been the main food involved.) Unless a woman has a history of exposure to PCBs, the academy sees no reason not to breast-feed.

If there is a well-documented history of exposure, PCB levels in breast milk can be measured in about three weeks. As a result, the committee recommends that in the rare instance where a high PCB level is found, the mother should contact the state health department for advice.

**Q: A friend told me recently that she was under the impression that trichinosis is no longer a public health problem and, therefore, it is not necessary to cook pork to a well-done stage. Is that true?**

A: While it is true that the incidence of trichinosis has dropped dramatically in the past 40 years, a study of over 8,000 autopsy specimens conducted by the National Institutes of Health Survey between the years 1966-70, has shown that the infection rate is still nearly 12%. But, there has been a marked drop in the severity of the trichinella infections found. Because many of the infections are so mild, symptoms are often misdiagnosed or the disease goes undetected.

One reason for the decline in the incidence of trichinosis is that federal, state and local laws now prohibit the use of raw garbage as feed for pigs. Another is that in many homes pork is frozen and trichina eggs are killed when held at nearly 5 degrees Fahrenheit for 20 to 30 days.

The link between pork and trichinosis is, of course, well-established. What may be less well-known is that in recent years trichinosis has frequently been traced to hamburger. In some cases the beef had been ground in the same machine used to grind pork, while in others the ground beef had actually been adulterated with pork. Besides cooking all pork and pork products to a temperature of 140 degrees Fahrenheit, it is just as important to thoroughly cook *ALL* other ground meat.

If you do choose to depend on freezing as a safeguard against trichinosis, you must be absolutely sure that the meat has been held at a low enough temperature for a long period of time