



## BASIC INFORMATION

### WHAT IS FOOD POISONING?

- Food poisoning is any illness that develops as a result of eating contaminated food
  - Also known as foodborne illness or foodborne disease
- Caused by consuming food or drink contaminated with
  - Bacteria
  - Parasites
  - Viruses
  - Toxins, mold or other contaminants
- Affects 1 in 6 Americans per year
- There are over 250 specific foodborne illnesses
- The CDC reports the top 5 "germs" that cause illnesses are
  - Norovirus
  - Salmonella
  - Clostridium perfringens
  - Campylobacter
  - Staphylococcus aureus (Staph)
- These causes are more likely to lead to more serious illnesses and hospitalization
  - Clostridium botulinum (botulism)
  - Listeria
  - Escherichia coli (E. coli)
  - Vibrio
- There are a multitude of ways for food to become contaminated

### WHAT ARE COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS?

- Symptoms can start within hours to days after consuming contaminated food and include
  - Stomach cramps and upset
  - Diarrhea
  - Nausea
  - Vomiting
  - Fever
- Severe signs and symptoms can include
  - Blood in vomit or stools
  - Dehydration
    - Dry mouth and throat
    - Decreased urination
    - Dizziness
  - Diarrhea lasting longer than 3-4 days
  - High fever



Image of food poisoning symptoms courtesy of CDC.  
[Public Domain]. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/symptoms.html>.

### WHAT CAUSES FOOD POISONING?

- The most common causes are infectious organisms: including various bacteria, viruses and parasites, or toxins
- Contamination of food can happen during its production
- Cross-contamination: the transfer of harmful organisms from one surface to another
- Water that is used during growing or even shipping can be contaminated
- Improper food handling during preparation
  - Home
  - Restaurants
  - Grocery stores

## WHAT INCREASES MY RISK?

- Eating food that is improperly prepared or stored
- Lack of good hygiene when preparing food
- Drinking water or eating raw foods when traveling in a foreign country
- Individuals at increased risk, who also when exposed, could exhibit more severe symptoms
  - Children under 5
  - Pregnant women
  - Adults over 65
  - Immune system disorders

## WHAT ARE POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS?

- Dehydration is the most common complication
- In severe illness, some serious effects could be
  - Kidney failure
  - Arthritis
  - Brain or nerve damage
  - Death

## WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

- Most cases improve within a few days
- Rest, reduce activity, increase fluid intake

## HOW DO I REDUCE MY RISK?

- Wash your hands, utensils and food surfaces often
- Properly cook and store foods
- Avoid raw seafood, meat, or dairy products
- Avoid unpasteurized food products
- Throw food items away that are old, have an "off" smell, or do not look or feel right

# DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

## WHAT GENERAL MEASURES SHOULD I TAKE?

- Your healthcare provider will ask about your signs and symptoms, perform a physical exam and obtain a detailed history
- Self-Care
  - Get plenty of rest
  - Let stomach settle, eat when you feel up to it
  - Try sucking on ice chips or taking small, frequent sips of water
  - Try drinking clear liquids
    - Clear broth
    - Apple juice
    - Herbal teas
    - 7UP or ginger ale
    - Rehydration drinks
- Activity
  - Get extra rest until diarrhea, vomiting, and fever improve
- Diet
  - Clear liquid or full liquid diet as tolerated
  - When ready to try eating, start with small, light meals
    - Avoid fatty foods, spicy foods
    - Bland foods, such as toast, crackers, rice or bananas
  - Once symptoms improve, try a diet of complex carbohydrates (rice, wheat, potatoes, bread, cereal, and lean meat such as chicken)
  - Avoid alcohol, caffeine, high-sugar foods or fatty foods
- Helpful Links
  - To Learn More: National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC)
    - Phone: (800) 891-5389
    - Email: [nddic@info.niddk.nih.gov](mailto:nddic@info.niddk.nih.gov)
    - Website: [www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov)
  - To Learn More: CDC
    - Phone: (800) CDC-INFO [232-4436]
    - Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/foodborne-germs.html>

## WHAT ARE COMMON LABS AND TESTS?

- Diagnostic tests may be conducted to identify the cause and confirm the diagnosis
  - Blood test
  - Stool for examination
  - Tests on the food you consumed
  - Sigmoidoscopy: a thin, hollow tube, inserted rectally, to look for sources of bleeding or infection

## WHAT ARE MY TREATMENT OPTIONS?

- The main treatment is to remain hydrated by replacing fluid and electrolytes (salts and minerals) lost through vomiting or diarrhea
  - Control of nausea and vomiting
  - Management of diarrhea
- Get plenty of rest
- Generally the illness needs to run its course
- Hospital care may be required if symptoms are severe
  - Fluids may be given through a vein (IV)

## WHAT MEDICATIONS MAY BE PRESCRIBED?

- Antibiotics may be prescribed for certain kinds of bacterial food poisoning
- If the vomiting is severe you may be prescribed an anti-nausea (antiemetic) medication

## WHAT CAUTIONS SHOULD I TAKE?

- Ensure adequate fluid intake to prevent dehydration

- Don't use anti-diarrheal medications such as loperamide (Imodium) and diphenoxylate with atropine (Lomotil, Lonox), unless recommended by your healthcare provider
  - May slow elimination of bacteria or toxins from your system
- Follow food safety guidelines
- Avoid preparing foods for others
- Ensure all household members maintain strict hand hygiene
- Ensure all bathroom surfaces get cleaned frequently

## WHEN SHOULD I SEEK MEDICAL HELP?

- You or your family member has symptoms of food poisoning that cause concern
- Diarrhea lasts longer than 72 hours
- High fever
- Blood in your stools
- Signs of dehydration including lightheadedness when standing, weakness, decreased urination
  - Children and older adults have a greater risk of experiencing negative effects than in otherwise healthy adults
- Being unable to drink fluids due to severe vomiting

# MY HEALTHCARE PROVIDER'S COMMENTS

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## REFERENCES

- Foodborne Illnesses and Germs. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/foodborne-germs.html>. Accessed May 2019.
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- Food Poisoning. MedlinePlus; A service of the National Library of Medicine, National Institute of Health. Available at: <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001652.htm> . Accessed May 2019.
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