

Illnesses

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Foodborne Illness

What is it?

Illness caused by food contaminated with bacteria, viruses, parasites, or toxins.

Symptoms:

- Diarrhea, which may be bloody
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Dehydration
- Low-grade fever (sometimes)

If you are very dehydrated, you might notice:

- Feeling lightheaded or faint, especially when you stand up
- Fatigue
- Dark-colored urine
- Less frequent urination

- Excessive thirst

Plan of Action:

- **Sip liquids**, such as a sports drink or water, to prevent dehydration. Drinking fluids too quickly can worsen nausea and vomiting, so try to take small frequent sips over a couple of hours instead of drinking a large amount at once.
- **Take note of urination.** You should be urinating at regular intervals, and your urine should be light and clear. Infrequent passage of dark urine is a sign of dehydration. Dizziness and lightheadedness also are symptoms of dehydration. If any of these symptoms occur and you can't drink enough fluids, seek medical attention.
- **Avoid anti-diarrheal medications.** They may slow your body's removal of organisms or toxins from your system. If in doubt, check with your doctor about your particular situation.

Foodborne illness often improves on its own within a few days.

Call your doctor if:

- Vomiting persists for more than two days
- Diarrhea persists for more than several days
- Diarrhea turns bloody, black or tarry
- Fever is 101 F (38.3 C) or higher

- Lightheadedness or fainting occurs with standing
- Confusion develops
- Worrisome abdominal pain develops

Seek emergency medical assistance if:

- You have severe symptoms, such as severe abdominal pain or watery diarrhea that turns very bloody within 24 hours.
- You belong to a high-risk group.
- You suspect botulism poisoning. Botulism is a potentially fatal food poisoning that results from the ingestion of a toxin formed by certain spores in food. Botulism toxin is most often found in home-canned foods, especially green beans or tomatoes.

Symptoms of botulism usually begin 12 to 36 hours after eating the contaminated food and may include headache, blurred vision, muscle weakness and eventual paralysis. Some people also have nausea and vomiting, constipation, urinary retention, difficulty breathing, and a dry mouth. These symptoms require immediate medical attention.

Gastroenteritis

What is it?

An inflammation of your stomach and intestines.

Symptoms:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Low-grade fever (sometimes)

Depending on the cause of the inflammation, symptoms may last from one day to more than a week.

Plan of Action:

- **Sip liquids**, such as a sports drink or water, to prevent dehydration. Drinking fluids too quickly can worsen the nausea and vomiting, so try to take small frequent sips over a couple of hours, instead of drinking a large amount at once.
- **Take note of urination.** You should be urinating at regular intervals, and your urine should be light and clear. Infrequent passage of dark urine is a sign of dehydration. Dizziness and lightheadedness also are signs of dehydration. If any of these signs and symptoms occur and you can't drink enough fluids,

seek medical attention.

- **Ease back into eating.** Try to eat small amounts of food frequently if you experience nausea. Otherwise, gradually begin to eat bland, easy-to-digest foods, such as soda crackers, toast, gelatin, bananas, applesauce, rice and chicken. Stop eating if your nausea returns. Avoid milk and dairy products, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and fatty or highly seasoned foods for a few days.
- **Get plenty of rest.** The illness and dehydration can make you weak and tired.

Seek medical attention if:

- Vomiting persists more than two days
- Diarrhea persists more than several days
- Diarrhea turns bloody
- Fever is more than 102 F (39 C) or higher
- Lightheadedness or fainting occurs with standing
- Confusion develops
- Worrisome abdominal pain develops

Motion Sickness

What is it?

Nausea caused by motion.

Symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Cold sweats
- Headache
- Irritability
- Pale skin
- Rapid breathing
- Dizziness
- Vomiting
- Nausea

Plan of Action:

Usually quiets down as soon as the motion stops. The more you travel, the more easily you'll adjust to being in motion.

If you're susceptible to motion sickness:

- **Focus on the horizon** or on a distant, stationary object. Don't read or use electronic devices while traveling.
- **Keep your head still**, while resting against a seat back.
- **Don't smoke** and don't sit near smokers.
- **Avoid strong odors**, spicy and greasy foods, and alcohol.
- **Take an antihistamine**, which you can buy without a prescription. Medicines include dimenhydrinate (Dramamine, Draminate, others) and meclizine (Dramamine Less Drowsy, Travel-Ease, others). Take these medicines at least 30 to 60 minutes before you travel. Expect drowsiness as a side effect.
- **Consider scopolamine**, available in a prescription adhesive patch called Transderm Scop. Several hours before you plan to travel, apply the patch behind your ear for 72-hour protection. Talk to your health care provider before using the medicine if you have health problems such as glaucoma or urine retention.
- **Try ginger.** A ginger supplement combined with ginger snaps, ginger ale, or candied ginger might help curb nausea.
- **Eat lightly.** Some people find that nibbling on plain crackers and sipping cold water or a carbonated drink without caffeine help.