

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.

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