

# Food Poisoning

## Definition

- Rapid onset of vomiting and diarrhea after eating a bad food

## Health Information

### Symptoms

- Vomiting, nausea, abdominal cramps and/or diarrhea
- Rapid onset of symptoms within 1 to 12 hours after eating suspected contaminated food
- Fever occurs in less than 10% of cases
- Food poisoning outbreaks are common with food poisoning. Outbreaks mean 2 or more people with like symptoms after eating the same food. This finding helps to confirm food poisoning.
- Rare before 1 year old because not seen with baby foods

### Causes

- Caused by toxins from germs growing in foods left out too long.
- The bacteria grow in the food if it is not kept cold.
- The bacteria produce toxins (chemicals) in the food.
- The toxins are what cause nausea and vomiting when they are swallowed. Most toxins are not made in the body.
- There are 2 main toxins that cause food poisoning: Staph toxin and Bacillus cereus toxin.
- **Staph toxin.** Common dishes are moist ones that have milk, cream, or eggs in them. Examples are potato salad, egg salad or ham. Picnics in summer are always a big risk.
- **Bacillus cereus toxin.** A bacteria found in rice. When rice is heated and set aside at room temperature, the bacteria can produce toxins. Often occurs with fried rice dishes in poorly managed Asian restaurants.

## Care Advice

### 1. Overview:

- The main treatment is diet changes to prevent dehydration.
- The symptoms of food poisoning go away on their own. They usually only last 1 day.
- Drugs and antibiotics are not helpful.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

### 2. Offer Small Amounts of Clear Fluids For 8 Hours:

- Water or ice chips are best for older children. (Reason: Water is easily absorbed).
- **ORS.** If your child vomits water, offer Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS). ORS is a special fluid that can help your child stay hydrated. You can use Pedialyte or the store brand. It can be bought in food or drug stores.
- Other clear fluids: Use half-strength Gatorade. Make it by mixing equal amounts of Gatorade and water. Can also mix flat lemon-lime soda the same way. Popsicles work great for some kids. ORS (such as Pedialyte) is usually not needed in older children.
- The key to success is giving small amounts of fluid. Offer 2-3 teaspoons (10-15 ml) every 5 minutes. Older kids can just slowly sip a clear fluid.
- After 4 hours without throwing up, increase the amount.
- After 8 hours without throwing up, return to regular fluids.
- **Caution:** If vomits over 12 hours, stop using water. Switch to ORS or half-strength Gatorade.

3. **Stop Solid Foods:**
  - Avoid all solid foods in kids who are vomiting.
  - After 8 hours without throwing up, gradually add them back.
  - Limit solids to bland foods. Starchy foods are easiest to digest.
  - Start with crackers, bread, cereals, rice, mashed potatoes, noodles.
  - Return to normal diet in 24-48 hours.
4. **Do Not Give Medicines:**
  - Stop using any drug that is over-the-counter for 8 hours.
  - **Fever.** Mild fevers don't need to be treated with any drugs. For higher fevers, you can use an acetaminophen (Tylenol) suppository. This is a form of the drug you put in the rectum.
  - **Call your doctor if:** Your child vomits a drug ordered by your doctor.
5. **Sleep:**
  - Help your child go to sleep for a few hours.
  - Reason: Sleep often empties the stomach and removes the need to vomit.
  - Your child doesn't have to drink anything if his stomach feels upset.
6. **For Vomiting with Diarrhea:**
  - If your child is having both vomiting and diarrhea, follow the advice for vomiting.
  - If your child cannot keep down fluids and diarrhea is more than mild, call back. Reason: increased risk for dehydration.
  - If your child starts having diarrhea alone, keep on a regular diet. Offer as much fluid as your child will drink. Milk is fine for diarrhea. So is half-strength Gatorade.
  - Caution: Do not use fruit juices or soft drinks. Reason: They make diarrhea worse.
7. **Report Suspected Restaurant:** If a restaurant is suspected as source of food poisoning, report it. Call your local Public Health Department (PHD).
8. **Prevention of Future Food Poisoning**
  - High-risk foods are meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products. Dishes that have milk in them are also high-risk.
  - When serving these foods, keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Avoid room temperature for these foods.
  - Put leftovers in the fridge promptly. Toss high-risk foods that have been left out for more than 2 hours.
9. **What to Expect:**
  - Once toxins leave the body, your child should start to feel better. Nausea and vomiting usually last less than 1 day.
  - Diarrhea usually lasts less than 2 days.
  - Food poisoning is usually a brief illness.
10. **Return to School:**
  - The toxins that cause food poisoning cannot be spread to others.
  - Your child can return to school after the vomiting and fever are gone.

## Call Your Doctor If

- Vomits clear fluids for more than 8 hours
- Vomiting lasts more than 24 hours
- Diarrhea lasts more than 2 days
- Signs of dehydration occur
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

### Pediatric Care Advice

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