

Food Poisoning (Foodborne Infection)

Infections that cause food poisoning

- Campylobacter bacteria – the most common cause of food poisoning in the UK
- Salmonella bacteria
- E. coli bacteria
- Norovirus
- Listeria

How do you get food poisoning?

Food poisoning is caused by eating something that has been contaminated with germs. This can happen if food:

- is not cooked or reheated thoroughly.
- is not stored correctly – for example, it has not been frozen or chilled.
- is left out too long.
- is handled by someone who is ill or has not washed their hands.
- is eaten after its 'use by' date.

You can get food poisoning from any food.

What are the symptoms?

- Nausea (feeling sick) or vomiting (being sick)
- Diarrhoea
- Stomach cramps
- High temperature of 38°C or above
- Generally feeling unwell – such as tired or having aches or chills

Symptoms usually start within 2 to 5 days of eating the food which caused the infection, but sometimes symptoms can start within a few hours up to 10 days.

What to do if you have food poisoning

In general, there is no specific treatment for food poisoning, and you can usually treat yourself at home.

- Stay off school or work until you have not been sick or had diarrhoea for at least 2 days.
- Rest
- Drink lots of water to prevent dehydration – you can sip it if this is easier.
- Consider speaking to your pharmacist about an oral rehydration solution (ORS)
- Eat when you feel up to it – try small, light meals.
- Eat bland foods like toast, crackers, banana, and rice until you feel better.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, fizzy drinks, spicy and fatty foods – they may make you feel worse.
- Clean your fridge and consider discarding any open food products that could be contaminated.

If you do not improve or you are concerned about your health, seek medical attention as a small number of people do require antibiotics for some types of food poisoning.

If a specific infection is diagnosed, you may be contacted by a public health practitioner to discuss how you might have got the infection.

How to prevent food poisoning (World Health Organisation)

- Keep clean (e.g., hands washed, and food preparation areas sanitized)
- Separate raw and cooked food (e.g., when storing and preparing food)
- Cook or reheat food thoroughly.
- Keep food at safe temperatures.
- Use safe water and raw materials (e.g., do not use food beyond expiry date)

Please note that food brought into hospital by patients or relatives (including food ordered as take away) will not be reheated by our staff.

Hand hygiene

- The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Patients should always clean their hands after toileting and prior to meals. Hand cleaning wipes are available for patient use at the bedside.
- Alcohol hand gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Sources of information

If you have any queries, please discuss with the nursing or medical staff who can contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team. You can obtain information from the following NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/food-poisoning/>

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4784 or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Other formats

If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The Clinical Specialty that has agreed this patient information leaflet: Infection Prevention and Control Team

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