

Advice for patients suffering from food poisoning

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01392 402093 or at rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services) or on 01271 314090 or at rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net (for North Devon services).

What causes food poisoning?

Campylobacter is the commonest cause of bacterial food poisoning in Britain, and Salmonella is the second most common.

Who gets food poisoning?

Anyone can get food poisoning, but young children under five years of age, those over 60 and people who have weakened immune systems have a greater risk of becoming unwell.

People who work with farm animals or in the meat industry, and people who have travelled to developing countries, are at greater risk of getting Campylobacter.

What are the symptoms of food poisoning?

Symptoms of food poisoning can include nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach cramps, fever and generally feeling unwell.

Symptoms can develop after six hours, but generally it takes one to five days, depending on which food poisoning bacteria you have been infected with. In some instances, it can take as long as 10 days or even several weeks.

The diarrhoea usually lasts for several days, but if it doesn't stop after that, seek advice from your doctor.

How do you get infected with food poisoning bacteria?

You usually get food poisoning from eating contaminated food. Both Campylobacter and Salmonella can be found in raw poultry and raw meat, whilst Salmonella can also affect eggs and milk.

Contamination is possible if raw and cooked foods are stored together. Using the same work surfaces and utensils for both raw and cooked foods increases the risk of contamination.

You can also get food poisoning bacteria from pets and other animals.

It is impossible to tell from appearance whether food is contaminated with food poisoning bacteria. It may look, smell and taste normal.

How is food poisoning diagnosed?

Food poisoning is diagnosed by inspection and culture of a stool specimen. You may be asked to provide a stool sample which will be tested in a laboratory. Results are normally available in five working days.

How is food poisoning treated?

Generally, people who get food poisoning don't require any medication. However, it is important to drink plenty of fluids, as diarrhoea and vomiting can lead to dehydration and you can lose important sugars and minerals from your body. Your doctor may recommend a re-hydration solution, available from a pharmacist.

How can I reduce the risk of spreading it to others?

Pay particular attention to your personal hygiene during and after your illness. You can still be carrying the bacteria for several days after your symptoms have finished.

Wash your hands after going to the toilet, changing a baby's nappy, helping with someone's hygiene needs for incontinence and before preparing and eating food. If you do not need to handle or prepare food, then you should avoid doing so.

Tell anyone caring for you or sharing your home that you have diarrhoea and show them this information leaflet.

There may be a need to investigate where you caught the bacteria from and, if so, you will be contacted by an environmental health officer who will provide further advice if necessary.

Further information

If you have any questions that we have not answered in this leaflet, please ask your nurse or doctor caring for you on the ward or contact one of the Infection Control nurses.

For Eastern services, call 01392 402355.

For Northern services, call 01271 322680.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact:

PALS Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter

- call 01392 402093 or email rduh.pals-eastern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital in Wonford, Exeter.

PALS North Devon

- call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at the North Devon District Hospital in Barnstaple.

Have your say

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Tell us about your experience of our services. Share your feedback on the Care Opinion website www.careopinion.org.uk.

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