

Advice for patients suffering with food poisoning

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

What causes food poisoning?

Most cases of food poisoning are caused by bacteria, such as Campylobacter and Salmonella. 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 immune systems that are not working properly, have a greater risk of becoming severely ill.

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

What are the symptoms of food poisoning?

Symptoms of food poisoning can include 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 sample of faeces 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 germ for some days after your symptoms have finished.

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water using the wash basin, not the kitchen sink. Dry your hands on a separate towel that is for your use only. You should do this:

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

Tell anyone nursing 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 your illness 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 queries, please ask the ward staff or contact the Infection Control Department on **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 call 01271 314090 or e-mail ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple
Devon EX31 4JB
Tel. 01271 322577
www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk

© Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust
This leaflet was designed by the Communications Department.
Tel: 01271 313970 / email: ndht.communications@nhs.net