

10 Things To Do When You Think You're Sick

Remember Foodborne illness is not your fault, try to avoid feeling of self-blame. You're not alone - we're here to help.

1. Symptoms of foodborne disease can include stomach pains, nausea, fever, and diarrhea. Consult a healthcare provider when any of the following is present with diarrhea:

- High fever- a temperature over 101.5 degrees F as measured orally
- Blood in the stools (bloody diarrhea)
- Diarrhea that lasts more than 3 days
- Prolonged vomiting that prevents keeping even liquids down and can lead to dehydration
- Signs of severe dehydration, such as dry mouth, decreased urination, dizziness, fatigue, sticky saliva, sunken eyes, low blood pressure, or increased heart rate and/or breathing rate
- Confusion or difficulty reasoning

Note: Trust your instincts with your children's symptoms...you know your child best.

2. Practice very thorough personal hygiene. Wash hands often and thoroughly. Be extremely careful when caring for someone who is ill. If possible have the ill person use one bathroom separate from the rest of the family. If only one bathroom is available, clean and disinfect it after every use. Carefully seal and dispose of dirty diapers.

3. Due to the many different types of foodborne diseases and the varying symptoms they cause, they may require a wide variety of different treatments. In general, replacing lost fluids due to diarrhea or vomiting is important to avoid dehydration. If diarrhea is severe, rehydration solutions available at the pharmacy can be helpful, but sports drinks are not advisable to prevent dehydration. Diarrheal disease is caused by your body trying to rid itself of toxins, so exhibit care in taking antidiarrheal medications unless directed by a healthcare provider.

Care should also be exercised before taking antibiotics for a suspected foodborne illness. If caused by a virus, antibiotics will have no effect. In some cases, such as with E. coli O157:H7 disease, taking antibiotics can lead to more severe disease. (see reference article, [click here](#))

4. If you or your doctor suspect a foodborne illness, it is very important to have additional tests to determine which pathogen is making you sick. This is important information so appropriate care and treatment is chosen as well as important public health information which can assist in preventing the next person from getting sick.

Your infection can be diagnosed by specific laboratory tests requested by your healthcare provider. Bacterial illnesses are found by stool culture tests on fecal samples taken and sent to the laboratory. Viruses are more difficult to identify and are usually found by testing stool for genetic markers that indicate a specific virus. Parasites are identified by examining stool samples under the microscope. When

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diagnostic tests are taken, ask your healthcare provider when results will be available and who will contact you. Positive results may indicate the pathogen, but negative results can mean many different things. Often patients don't seek medical care until a few days after symptoms start. By this time, it may be the toxins released by the bacteria that are doing harm, but the bacteria themselves may not be culturable anymore.

5. If you or your healthcare provider suspect a foodborne illness, fill out a food history and diary form ([click here](#)) for the ill person(s) as soon as possible. This could be critical information needed later on to help figure out what food caused the illness or how the person became ill.

6. Gather and save all relevant grocery store, restaurant, and travel receipts for the time period you suspect the illness took place (remember many foodborne illnesses are caused by something you ate days or weeks ago). Do not give anyone your receipts without making copies.

7. If you still have access to any food/beverage products you suspect made you ill, keep them sealed and cold/frozen in case they need to be tested at a later time. Label them so that no one else consumes them. If you are asked for them by health authorities at a later point, give them a representative portion of the sample and not the entire sample, if possible.

8. Contact your state or local health department with a suspected or confirmed case of foodborne illness. Every health department is different and they will vary in receptiveness and response. If you or a family member are confirmed with a case of a reportable disease, insist that you be interviewed by the health department and questioned about where and what you or your child ate. This may involve filling out a very detailed questionnaire. Contact S.T.O.P. through our Helpline at 1-800-350-STOP for assistance with dealing with your health department &/or figuring out the source of your illness.

9. Check to see if anyone else you know or in your community, group or school has a similar disease. Also check to see if there have been any recalls for foods you have eaten or outbreaks of diseases you have been tested positive for. S.T.O.P.'s website under "Recalls" and/or "Outbreaks" can assist you in finding this information.

10. Call S.T.O.P.'s Helpline for victims of foodborne illness at 1-800-350-STOP.

We offer information, resources for victims and physicians, someone to talk to, connection to others who have gone through similar illnesses, and general assistance in navigating through the public health network in figuring out your disease. We'll lend a sympathetic ear whether you're in the acute phase of illness now or if you need help in the aftermath of the disease.

