

## When Good Food Goes Bad

More than 250 different diseases can cause food poisoning. Some of the most common diseases are infections caused by bacteria, such as *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, *E. coli O157:H7*, *Listeria*, and *Botulism*.

### What Is Campylobacter Infection?

Campylobacter is a bacterium that causes acute diarrhoea. Transmission usually occurs through ingestion of contaminated food, water, or unpasteurised milk or through contact with infected infants, pets or wild animals.

Symptoms include:

- Diarrhoea
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain and/or cramping
- Malaise (general uneasiness)
- Fever

### Is Campylobacter Infection a Serious Health Concern?

It can be, especially in those with weakened immune systems. In rare cases, the campylobacter infection can cause additional problems such as arthritis or brain and nerve problems. Occasionally, these problems occur after the diarrhoea has stopped.



### How is the Campylobacter Infection Diagnosed and Treated?

If you think you may have been exposed to the infection, see your doctor immediately.

If you are found to have the infection, you will likely recover on your own without treatment within 2-5 days. Drink plenty of fluids to prevent becoming dehydrated. In more severe cases, antibiotics if given early in the illness, can be used to shorten the length of time you are sick.

### What Is Salmonella?

Salmonella is a bacterial infection that can be passed on to humans from domestic and wild animals, including poultry, pigs, cattle, and pets. But most often, it is caused by drinking unpasteurised milk or by eating undercooked poultry and poultry products such as eggs. Any food prepared on surfaces contaminated by raw chicken or turkey can also become tainted with salmonella. Less often, the illness may stem from food contaminated by a food worker.

Salmonella can escape from the intestine into the blood and travel to other organs. It may become a chronic infection in some people, who can be symptom-free yet capable of spreading the disease to others.

Salmonella infections occur worldwide, but it is most extensively reported in North America and Europe.

Symptoms include acute onset of:

- Fever

- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhoea
- Nausea
- Vomiting (sometimes)

These symptoms, along with loss of appetite, can persist for several days.

### **Can Salmonella Infection Cause Serious Health Problems?**

Although most people recover completely (which sometimes can take several months), salmonella infection may cause a condition known as Reiter's syndrome in a small percentage of people. Symptoms of Reiter's syndrome include joint pain, eye irritation and pain when urinating. The joint pain of Reiter's syndrome may develop into a chronic arthritis.

Salmonella infection rarely causes death, although it can occur in the very young, very old or among those who have compromised immune systems.

### **How Is Salmonella Infection Diagnosed and Treated?**

If you think you may have been exposed to the infection, see your doctor. By testing a sample of your stool, the bacteria can be identified.

Salmonella infections usually go away in 5-7 days and often do not require treatment unless you become severely dehydrated or the infection spreads outside the intestines. If treatment is needed, antibiotics are prescribed.

### **How Can I Prevent Getting Salmonella?**

Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat or poultry products, including eggs. It is also important to avoid "cross-contamination" which can occur if food is being prepared using the same utensils, or on the same surfaces as those used for raw or undercooked meats or poultry products.

Wash your hands frequently during and after food preparation. Those with a salmonella infection should not be involved in food preparation.

Wash your hands with soap after handling reptiles, birds or after contact with pet faeces. Avoid contact between reptiles (turtles, iguanas, other lizards, and snakes) and infants or people with weakened immune systems.

Huge amounts of food poisoning cases are not reported because people do not connect their symptoms with having eaten bad food.

We can stop contamination in the home by ensuring that raw meats are not allowed to come into contact with cooked foods, by washing hands before and after food preparation and before eating. Ensure work surfaces are disinfected on a frequent basis, particularly where there may have been contact with raw meats.



If you think you have contracted food poisoning from a restaurant or a similar establishment, report this to the local authority in order that they can arrange for an Environmental Health Officer to visit the premises to see if there are underlying issues that are causing the problem.