

## Food Poisoning

Bread, lettuce, tomato, mayo, mustard, onions, slice of cheese, ground beef and ketchup. These usually are the only ingredients in your hamburger. But before you take your first bite, you might want to follow a few simple steps to make sure you don't get a mouthful of *E. coli*, *giardia lamblia*, *shigella* or *staphylococcus aureus*.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, each year approximately 76 million Americans become ill from food poisoning and about 5,000 die. Various bacteria, viruses and parasites, or their toxins, are the most common causes of food poisoning. Food can be contaminated anywhere along the production process, from growing or harvesting, to processing and shipping, to preparing and storing. Some common culprits for contamination include raw meat and poultry, seafood, eggs, spinach, lettuce, tomatoes, sprouts, melons, unpasteurized apple cider, prepared salads, cream filled pastries, hot dogs and luncheon meats.

Symptoms of food poisoning can appear within hours after eating contaminated food or start days later. Illness resulting from food poisoning usually lasts from one to 10 days. Signs of food poisoning will vary in severity and according to the source of the contamination, amount of exposure to the infectious organism, and the person's age and overall health. Food poisoning generally causes nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, stomach cramps, fever, fatigue and loss of appetite.

Food poisoning can be prevented through proper handling and cooking of food to kill bacteria.

- Wash hands after handling or preparing food.
- Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw foods away from ready-to-eat foods.
- Cook food to the appropriate internal temperature.
- Promptly refrigerate or freeze leftover food that is perishable.
- Defrost foods in the refrigerator, not at room temperature.
- Rinse produce thoroughly.
- Throw away food that may be contaminated.
- Keep utensils and food preparation areas clean.
- Marinate food in the refrigerator.
- Remove stuffing from poultry and store it separately.
- Keep hot food hot and cold food cold.
- Wash sponges or dish towels every week in hot water in the washing machine.
- Leave enough room in the refrigerator for cool air to circulate.

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, you may still get food poisoning. If this happens, you can:

- Let your stomach settle and don't eat or drink for a little while.
- Try drinking clear soda or non-caffeinated sport drinks. Adults should try to drink eight to 16 glasses of fluids daily.
- Gradually start eating bland foods that are easy to digest, such as toast, gelatin, bananas or rice. If nausea returns, stop eating.
- Avoid dairy products, caffeine, alcohol, and fatty or very seasoned foods until you feel better.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Do not use medications to treat diarrhea because this could slow down the elimination of toxins from your system.

There are more than 250 different foodborne diseases that can cause many different symptoms. Fortunately, most people recover from food poisoning within a few days. For more information about food poisoning, talk with your doctor or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).