

I might have a foodborne illness, now what?

In otherwise healthy people, most foodborne illnesses go away within a couple of days without medical attention.

- **People at risk, or who have severe or long-lasting symptoms, should go to the doctor.**
- Go to the doctor if you have severe dehydration (loss of water); bloody or loose, gray diarrhea; a fever that lasts more than 2 days; numbness; or difficulty breathing. A stool sample is required to find out what is making you sick.
- Wash your hands with soap. Many foodborne illnesses can be spread to other people if you don't wash your hands carefully.
- Prevent dehydration—drink plenty of water.
- Call your local health department if the food that you think made you sick was served at a large gathering or is from a restaurant or other public food facility, like a grocery store.
- Your last meal was probably **NOT** what made you sick. Your doctor and the health department will need to know the food you ate and your activities for the past 3 days. This 3-day history includes every meal, snack and drink; travel; visitors; meetings; shopping; contact with animals; and events.



How can I prevent foodborne illnesses?

- **Wash**—Wash your hands before eating or handling food, after handling raw meat, or using the bathroom.
- **Clean**—Wash utensils, cutting boards, and counters before and after food preparation, especially after raw meat.
- **Separate**—Keep raw meats and their juices away from other foods at all times (in the shopping cart, refrigerator, ice chest, etc.).
- **Rinse**—Clean all fruits and vegetables before peeling or eating.
- **Cook**—Thoroughly cook all meat, poultry and seafood. Use a thermometer to check doneness.
- **Cool**—Chill leftovers as fast as possible. Cut large pieces of meat into smaller chunks and put thick foods (like beans) into shallow pans. Keep them uncovered in the refrigerator until the food is cool.
- **Reheat**—Reheat all leftovers quickly until they are steaming hot.
- **Discard**—Discard potentially hazardous, refrigerated leftovers after 4 days. (In general, potentially hazardous foods contain meat, cheese, eggs, milk, beans, or rice.)
- **Ask**—Know your source and only eat at or purchase foods from reputable companies. Ask to see their food service or retail food license (it should be posted and current). If prepared, potentially hazardous food seems colder than it should be, ask for a replacement meal.

Barry-Eaton District Health Department



Do I have a foodborne illness?



**Barry-Eaton District
Health Department**

*Caring for the Community
Since the 1930's*

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A Foodborne Illness

A foodborne illness is any illness caused by ingesting contaminated food or water.

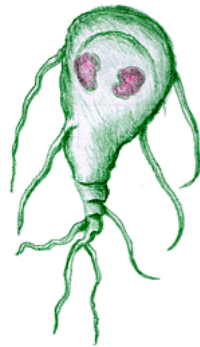
Although the United States has one of the safest food supplies in the world, 76 million Americans get sick, 325,000 go to the hospital, and 5000 die each year from foodborne illnesses

(CDC). Foodborne illnesses are usually caused by things you cannot see, smell or taste — bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemicals. Most foodborne illnesses don't last long (1-3 days), go away on their own, and are not life-threatening; but some foodborne illnesses can be deadly.

Symptoms

Most of the things that cause foodborne illnesses affect the digestive tract, and symptoms generally include nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhea and vomiting.

More severe symptoms can occur in people that are at risk: babies and children, senior citizens, pregnant women, and those on anti-



Giardia lamblia

biotics or with long-term health problems like cancer, AIDS, and diabetes.

Severe symptoms include:

- Bloody diarrhea
- Fever
- Headache
- Blurred vision
- Chest pain
- Paralysis
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)

The time between eating the contaminated food and showing symptoms, called the incubation period, can range from a few minutes to several months; but symptoms are usually observed within 48 hours.

Food Intoxication vs. Food Infection

FOOD INTOXICATION is also called food poisoning. The contaminant is a toxin or poison. The incubation time is generally short — symptoms are noticed within several minutes to a few hours.

Toxin sources include:

Bacteria—Several bacteria can grow on food and produce toxins that can make people sick. Many of these toxins are not destroyed by heat and can make you sick even after the food is cooked. Most of the toxins cause vomiting or diarrhea, but the *C. botulinum* toxin (rare, but sometimes found in improperly-canned foods) can cause paralysis and death if not treated immediately.

Metals—Zinc, cadmium, lead and other metals from cooking utensils can leach into food during food preparation and storage.

Chemicals—Pesticides, cleaners, and other mixtures can get into food when they are improperly used or stored.

Food Toxins—Some foods, like many species of mushrooms, fish and shellfish, contain toxins naturally and are not safe to eat. Other foods, like clams, mussels, tuna or salmon, can become toxic due to improper harvesting.

FOOD INFECTION is a foodborne illness that requires the growth of an organism to make you sick. Symptoms of a food infection are generally noticed after 12-48 hours but sometimes aren't noticed for months.

Infections include:

Bacterial—Many bacteria can be present on foods when grown at home or bought from the store. Bacteria can also be spread by unclean food workers. If you are at risk, bacteria can grow inside your intestines to make you sick.

Viral—Hepatitis A, rotavirus, and Norwalk-like viruses can be spread from infected people through food or surfaces. Once inside your body, the virus multiplies. Many viruses affect the liver and can cause jaundice.

Parasitic—Parasites, like the roundworm or the protozoan *Giardia lamblia*, use your intestines for a place to live and dine. Symptoms sometimes include weight loss and gray, watery diarrhea.