

Campylobacter Infection

What is Campylobacter infection?

Campylobacter infection is a bacterial infection of the digestive tract. Sometimes the infection spreads to other parts of the body.

What is the cause?

Bacteria called Campylobacter cause the infection. The bacteria may be in:

- Food or water contaminated by animals
- Unpasteurized milk
- Bowel movements of people who are infected

You may get infected after you drink dirty water or eat food that hasn't been cooked enough, like chicken. Bacteria may get into food if it is prepared by someone who is infected. This is especially likely if they don't wash their hands after using the toilet. The infection can spread easily from person to person in places like infant and preschool day care centers.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- Watery diarrhea
- Blood in the bowel movement, especially in children
- Stomachache
- Fever

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will review your symptoms and examine you. Samples of your blood and bowel movement may be tested in the lab.

How is it treated?

Treatment includes:

- Drinking clear liquids
- Eating soft foods
- Rest.

For more serious infections, your healthcare provider will prescribe an antibiotic to kill the bacteria. It is important to take all of the antibiotic. If you stop taking the medicine as soon as your symptoms are gone but before you have taken all of the medicine, symptoms may come back.

How long will the effects last?

Your symptoms should be gone in 5 to 8 days.

How can I take care of myself?

If you have a temperature over 100°F (37.8°C), rest as much as you can. Ask your healthcare provider if you can take aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen to control your fever.

- Check with your provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen and aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, do not take for more than 10 days for any reason.

If you have cramps or stomach pain, it may help to put a hot water bottle or heating pad on your stomach. Cover the hot water bottle with a towel or set an electric heating pad on low so you don't burn your skin.

It's OK to keep eating as long as it doesn't seem to make the diarrhea or stomach cramps worse. Foods that are easiest to digest are bananas, cooked cereal, plain rice or noodles, gelatin, eggs, toast or bread, crackers, cooked potatoes or carrots, and applesauce. Don't add butter or margarine to these foods. Avoid milk products and caffeine for a few days.

To let your bowel rest for a few hours, don't eat anything and drink only clear liquids. Clear liquids include water, weak tea, broth, apple or grape juice mixed with water, and sports drinks or other oral rehydration drinks. You may also drink light-colored soft drinks without caffeine (like 7 UP) after stirring until the bubbles are gone. Drink enough clear fluids to keep your urine light yellow in color. You need to get enough fluids to replace the fluids your body is losing while you are sick. This is especially important for children and older adults. Suck on ice chips or Popsicles if you feel too nauseated to drink fluids.

You can go back to your normal diet after 2 or 3 days, but for several days avoid fresh fruit (other than bananas), alcohol, and greasy or fatty foods like cheeseburgers, pizza, or bacon. Also avoid highly seasoned or spicy foods and most raw vegetables. It's OK to eat cooked carrots, potatoes, and squash. If eating seems to make the diarrhea worse, let your bowel rest for a few hours by drinking just clear liquids.

You can buy nonprescription medicine to treat diarrhea at the drugstore. If you use it, make sure you use only the dose recommended on the package. Don't use the medicine for more than 2 days without checking with your healthcare provider. If you have chronic health problems, always check with your provider before you use any medicine for diarrhea.

Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. Ask your provider:

- How and when you will hear your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

How can I help prevent Campylobacter infection?

To keep other people from getting infected by you, avoid unnecessary contact with others until your symptoms are gone. Wash your hands well with soap and water after you use the restroom. Do not prepare food for other people. If you must prepare or serve food, wash your hands thoroughly before you cook or serve food and before you eat. It can help to also wear gloves when you are preparing and serving food. Don't work as a food handler in restaurants, dining halls, or grocery stores until your diarrhea is completely gone or your healthcare provider says it's OK to go back to work. Keep children with diarrhea home from daycare and school until they have stopped having diarrhea.

To avoid getting Campylobacter:

- Make sure your food and drink come from safe sources.
- Handle raw poultry products carefully.
 - Rinse the meat before cooking.
 - Wash all cutting boards and utensils well before using them with other foods.
 - Cook the poultry thoroughly.
- Use only pasteurized (not raw) dairy products.
- Wash your hands well after using the bathroom.
- Always wash your hands before eating.
- If you are working with children, wash your hands often, especially if you are helping with diaper changes, helping children use the toilet, or using the same toilet facilities as the children.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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