

Salmonellosis Food Poisoning

What is salmonellosis?

Salmonellosis is an infection caused by bacteria called Salmonella. Because the bacteria usually enter the body through food, the infection is also called food poisoning.

Salmonella can go from your intestine into your bloodstream and infect other organs. Sometimes they cause a chronic (long-term) infection.

Salmonellosis can be very serious for very young children, older adults, or people with a weakened immune system. The immune system is the body's defense against infections.

What is the cause?

The bacteria can live in the animal or human intestine. Animals can carry the bacteria without looking or acting sick. Contaminated food usually looks and smells normal.

You may get infected if:

- You eat contaminated food, especially raw or undercooked meat, eggs, or poultry.
- You eat food that has been handled by someone who is infected.
- You eat or drink dairy products that have not been pasteurized (heated to kill certain bacteria)
- You have contact with an infected animal, including pets such as birds, turtles, or other reptiles.
- You swallow water from a well, lake, stream, or city water that has not been treated to kill germs.

What are the symptoms?

You may start feeling sick 8 hours to 3 days after eating contaminated food.

Symptoms may include:

- Diarrhea, which may be bloody
- Cramps or tenderness in your belly
- Fever and chills
- Nausea and vomiting

If the infection spreads to your blood, symptoms may include:

- Fever that comes and goes over several days
- Pain in your joints and around your heart and lungs
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Cough

- Rash

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Tests may include:

- Test of a sample of your bowel movements
- Blood test

How is it treated?

The goal of treatment is to stop vomiting and diarrhea and prevent dehydration (losing too much fluid from your body). If you have lost a lot of fluid, you may need to stay at the hospital for fluids through an IV. You will also be checked for possible complications of dehydration, such as kidney problems.

If you are undernourished, severely ill, very young, or have sickle cell disease, your provider may prescribe antibiotic medicine.

Salmonella food poisoning usually lasts 3 to 5 days. You may still have bacteria in your system for a while after you no longer have symptoms.

More serious salmonella infections--blood poisoning and typhoid fever--are treated with antibiotics. In some cases you may need to be treated at the hospital. It may take 2 weeks or longer to recover from blood poisoning or typhoid fever.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. Take all medicines exactly as prescribed.

Here are some things you can do to feel better:

- Rest your stomach and bowel but make sure that you keep getting fluids. You can do this by not eating anything and by drinking clear liquids only. Clear liquids include water, weak tea, fruit juice mixed half and half with water, Jell-O, or clear soft drinks without caffeine (like lemon-lime soda). Stir soda until the bubbles are gone (the bubbles can make vomiting worse). Avoid liquids that are acidic, like orange juice, or caffeinated, like coffee. If you have diarrhea, don't drink milk.
- If you have severe diarrhea, your body can lose too much fluid and you can get dehydrated. Dehydration can be very dangerous, especially for children and older adults. You may also be losing minerals that your body needs to keep working normally. Your healthcare provider may recommend an oral rehydration solution, which is a drink that replaces fluids and minerals.
- You may eat soft, plain foods. Good choices are soda crackers, toast, plain noodles, or rice, cooked cereal, applesauce, and bananas. Eat slowly and avoid foods that are hard to digest or may irritate your stomach, such as foods with acid (like tomatoes or oranges), spicy or fatty food, meats, and raw vegetables. You may be able to go back to your normal diet in a few days.

- 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 the heating pad on low so you don't burn your skin.
- Rest as much as possible. Sit or lie down with your head propped up. Don't lie flat for at least 2 hours after eating.
- Don't take aspirin, ibuprofen, or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) without checking first with your healthcare provider. NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen, naproxen, 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, you should not take this medicine for more than 10 days.

Ask your healthcare 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 salmonellosis?

Salmonella can be a serious health threat to you and the people around you. It cannot be treated with many of the antibiotics that are usually used to treat infections. Prevention is very important. These steps can help prevent food poisoning:

- Make sure you cook all foods well, especially, especially beef, chicken, turkey, pork, seafood, and eggs. Pork should be heated to an internal temperature of at least 160°F (71°C). For whole chickens and turkeys a temperature of 180°F (82°C) is recommended for thigh meat and 170°F (77°C) for breast meat.
- Wash your hands and clean any dishes or utensils before you prepare, cook, serve, or eat food. Keep kitchen counters and other food preparation surfaces clean. Replace used dishcloths and kitchen towels with clean ones often.
- Cover any sore or cut on your hands before preparing food. Use rubber gloves or cover the sore with a clean bandage.
- Make sure the milk, cheese, and juice products you eat and drink have been pasteurized.
- Rinse fresh vegetables and fruits before you eat or cook them.
- Thaw frozen meats in the refrigerator or a microwave. Do not let meat stand at room temperature.
- Keep juices from raw meat, poultry, and seafood away from other foods.
- Refrigerate any food you will not be eating right away.

- Wash your hands after you go to the bathroom or touch animals, especially pets such as birds, turtles, or other reptiles.
- If you take care of young children, wash your hands often and dispose of diapers carefully so that bacteria can't spread to other surfaces or people.
- When you travel to places where contamination is more likely, eat only hot, freshly cooked food. Drink only bottled water and liquids. Avoid tap water and ice or boil water before drinking. Don't eat raw vegetables or unpeeled fruit.

You may need to get immunized against typhoid fever before you travel outside the US. Check the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the countries where you will be going. Also get immunized if a member of your household carries the disease. The typhoid vaccine comes in 2 forms: oral and injection. Both forms are effective. You can get more information from the CDC's Traveler's Health Web site: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>.

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.