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# The Best Ways To Cure Food Poisoning

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARIA DEL RIO.

If you've ever felt a bubbling in your stomach that turned into a night on stand-by in front of your toilet, you probably found yourself asking, "Was it something I ate?" If you have, you're one of 48 million people (roughly 1 in 6) in the U.S. who get food poisoning every year.

Food poisoning happens when you've eaten something that's been contaminated by a parasite, bacteria (like *E. coli* or *salmonella*) or a virus (like norovirus). Sometimes these germs get into food when the person doing the prep didn't wash their hands properly; other times it's because you ate something raw (like oysters) or undercooked meat.

When this happens, your body reacts by trying to expel the bugs through diarrhea or vomiting, explains Robynne Chutkan, MD, founder of The Digestive Center For Women in Chevy Chase, MD. Other symptoms of food poisoning include stomach cramping, fever, and general fatigue, but diarrhea and vomiting are the most common.

Most instances of food poisoning will resolve for the most part within 24 hours, and you can manage your symptoms on your own. Ahead, we'll cover the important steps for getting through it.

### **First off, put away the Pepto-Bismol.**

“We really advise people against using anti-diarrheals when they have food poisoning,” Dr. Chutkan says. She explains that while it may be your first instinct to quell those queasy symptoms, diarrhea is your body’s way of getting rid of the bad bacteria in your body that’s making you sick.

“When you use an anti-diarrheal, you’re stocking up all that toxin and bad bacteria and that can trap and prolong illness,” she explains. “The body is trying to get rid of something because it recognizes that this is not something that you should have ingested.”

Dr. Chutkan says that if you *absolutely* have to leave the house and you’re afraid of an accident, go ahead and take an anti-diarrheal. But for the most part, you’ll want to let your body do what it does to make sure you recover ASAP.

### **Drink lots of fluids.**

The next step is to stay hydrated. A big part of why food poisoning makes you feel so awful, Dr. Chutkan says, is that all the diarrhea and vomiting cause dehydration. Regular water will work to rehydrate if that's all you can handle, but Chutkan says drinking unflavored, unsweetened coconut water can also help because it contains potassium and other electrolytes that you may be losing while ill. (Pedialyte or Gatorade work too, of course. It's up to you.)

**Take it easy on your stomach at first.**

Once the vomiting and diarrhea subsides, you'll need to eat something. But keep in mind that your GI system just went through quite the shock. To ease yourself back to the land of the living, Dr. Chutkan recommends remembering the acronym BRAT, which stands for bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast, when choosing your first few meals.

Crackers and chicken noodle soup are also good options for the next day or so while you're recovering.

**Know when to see a doctor.**

Although most cases of food poisoning will resolve on their own, there are cases of more serious infections. If your diarrhea symptoms persist for 72 hours or longer, you've been throwing up for longer than 24 hours, or you have diarrhea plus a fever of 101 or higher, you should head to your doctor or urgent care, Dr. Chutkan says. In rare cases in which your symptoms are severe and don't seem to be slowing down, you might need IV fluids to keep you hydrated and antibiotics to help your body clear the infection.

People recovering from these more severe instances of food-poisoning may have lasting symptoms caused by what's known as post-infectious irritable bowel syndrome, Dr. Chutkan says. It's not totally clear how common this is, or why some people go on to develop lasting symptoms while others don't, but one of the strongest risk factors seems to be length of initial infection. So the faster you treat a serious case of food poisoning, the better.

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