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Food Poisoning

Food poisoning—any illness or disease that results from eating contaminated food—affects millions of Americans each year. While the American food supply is among the safest in the world, the Federal government estimates that there are about 48 million cases of foodborne illness annually—the equivalent of sickening 1 in 6 Americans each year. And each year these illnesses result in an estimated 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths.

Causes of Food Poisoning

- **Bacteria and Viruses:** [Bacteria and viruses](#) are the most common cause of food poisoning. The symptoms and severity of food poisoning vary, depending on which bacteria or virus has contaminated the food.
- **Parasites:** Parasites are organisms that derive nourishment and protection from other living organisms known as hosts. In the United States, the most common foodborne parasites are protozoa, roundworms, and tapeworms.
- **Molds, Toxins, and Contaminants:** Most food poisoning is caused by bacteria, viruses, and parasites rather than toxic substances in the food. But some cases of food poisoning can be linked to either natural toxins or added chemical toxins.
- **Allergens:** Food allergy is an abnormal response to a food triggered by your body's immune system. Some foods, such as nuts, milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat or soybeans, can cause allergic reactions in people with food allergies.

Symptoms of Food Poisoning

Symptoms may range from mild to severe and differ depending on the germ you swallowed. The most common symptoms of food poisoning include:

- Upset stomach
- Stomach cramps
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Dehydration

Serious long-term effects associated with several common types of food poisoning include:

- Kidney failure
- Chronic arthritis
- Brain and nerve damage
- Death

People at Risk

Certain groups of people are more susceptible to foodborne illness. This means that they are more likely to get sick from contaminated food and, if they do get sick, the effects are much more serious. These groups include:

- Pregnant women
- Children younger than 5 years
- Adults age 65 and older
- People whose immune systems are weakened due to illness or medical treatment

General Information

[Foodborne Illness A-Z](#)(CDC)

[Foodborne Illnesses and Germs](#) (CDC)

[Foodborne Illness: What Consumers Need to Know](#) (USDA)

[Bad Bug Book](#) (FDA)

Additional Resources

[People with a Higher Risk of Food Poisoning \(CDC\)](#)

[Listeria– People at Risk \(CDC\)](#)

[Food Safety for Older Adults \(FDA\)](#)

[Food Safety for People with Cancer, Diabetes, HIV/AIDS, Organ Transplants, and Autoimmune Diseases \(FDA\)](#)

[Everyday Food Safety for Young Adults \(FDA\)](#)

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