

The risk of food poisoning can be reduced through appropriate storage, cooking and hygiene practices.

FOOD POISONING

Food poisoning is generally caused by eating food containing high levels of bacteria. Toxins produced by bacteria, viruses and parasites can also cause food poisoning.

Bacteria can multiply very quickly under the following conditions:

- **Time** – one bacterium can multiply into two million bacteria within seven hours.
- **Temperature** – food poisoning bacteria grow best between 5oC and 60oC.
- **Nutrients** – bacteria need nutrients from food in order to grow and multiply. Foods such as dairy products, egg products, meat, poultry, fish and shellfish allow bacteria to multiply rapidly.
- **Water** – without water, bacteria growth may slow down or stop.

CAUSES OF CONTAMINATION

Contamination of food is often the result of poor food handling, storage or hygiene. Therefore, it is important to take extra care with processing, transporting, storing, preparing and serving food.

- **During storage** – store cooked and ready-to-eat food on the shelves above raw food. This will prevent any liquid from the raw food dripping onto the cooked and ready-to-eat foods. Food should also be stored in airtight containers or covered with 'food grade' plastic at all times.
- **During food preparation** – wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw poultry, meats or their packaging and before you touch any ready-to-eat or cooked foods.
Clean all utensils, cutting boards and bench areas used to prepare raw foods before using them with cooked or ready-to-eat foods.

FOOD POISONING BACTERIA

- **Bacillus cereus** – found in cereals, rice, meat products, spices and cornflour products. Symptoms, developing 2 to 24 hours after eating contaminated food, include nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and stomach cramps.
- **Campylobacter** – found in meat and poultry, untreated water, raw milk and on some animals. Symptoms, developing two to five days after eating contaminated food, include diarrhoea, abdominal pain, vomiting, fever and nausea.
- **Clostridium botulinum** – found in canned and vacuum packed foods. Initial symptoms, developing 12 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food, include blurred or double vision, dry mouth, fatigue, headache and dizziness. This is followed by nerve impairment, weakness or paralysis. Vomiting, constipation and diarrhoea may also be present.
- **Clostridium perfringens** – found in raw meats, poultry and dehydrated products. Symptoms, developing 6 to 24 hours after eating contaminated food, include diarrhoea, abdominal cramps and nausea. Vomiting is rare.
- **Escherichia coli (E.coli)** – found in raw or undercooked meats, unpasteurised milk and raw vegetables. Symptoms, developing 18 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food, include diarrhoea (possibly containing blood), abdominal cramps, fever, nausea and vomiting.
- **Listeria monocytogenes** – found in raw milk, soft cheeses, vegetables, ready-to-eat meats, seafood, pre-prepared salads and soft serve icecream. The initial symptoms are flu-like, with general aches and fever. Meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning) can develop. Symptoms develop approximately three weeks after eating contaminated food, however in some cases it may take several months.
- **Salmonella** – found in meat, poultry, eggs and egg products. Symptoms, developing 12 to 36 hours after eating contaminated food, include nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, fever and headache.
- **Staphylococcus aureus** – found in meat and poultry dishes, egg products, mayonnaise-based salads and cream or custard filled desserts. Symptoms, developing two to four hours after eating contaminated food, include acute vomiting, nausea, occasionally diarrhoea and cramps.

General Information

REPORT FOOD POISONING

If you have food poisoning symptoms, report them immediately to your doctor to ensure that you receive proper treatment and advice.

Childcare and health care workers with food poisoning must not work, nor should children attend school, until all the symptoms have ceased.

The food legislation requires all food handlers to report to their supervisor if they have symptoms, or know that they are a carrier of a food borne illness. Such persons are obliged not to handle food until they are recovered or, if a carrier, free of the organism of concern.

SEE ALSO

- Food poisoning - Bacillus cereus
- Food poisoning - Campylobacter
- Food poisoning - Clostridium botulinum
- Food poisoning - Clostridium perfringens
- Food poisoning - Escherichia coli (E.coli)
- Food poisoning - Staphylococcus
- Food poisoning - Listeria monocytogenes
- Food poisoning - Salmonella

CONTACT DETAILS

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