

Patient information: Salmonellosis (Salmonella) (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What is salmonellosis (salmonella infection)? — Salmonella infection is an illness that can cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. "Salmonella" is a kind of bacteria. People get the infection from foods that contain the bacteria. People can also get the infection from touching certain animals, such as chickens, ducks, and turtles.

Salmonella infection is common. It is not serious for most people. But sometimes the bacteria get into the bloodstream. If this happens, people with certain conditions could get very sick. These include people with:

- AIDS – This is an illness that makes the body's infection-fighting system, called the "immune system," very weak.
- Cancer – People who recently had a treatment called "chemotherapy" have a higher risk of getting very sick.
- Sickle cell disease – This is an illness that affects the red blood cells.
- An organ transplant (such as a new heart, lung, or kidney)

Other people who can get very sick include:

- People taking high doses of steroid medicines or other medicines that weaken the immune system
- Babies who were born too early or with immune system problems

If you have heart disease or a man-made joint, there is a small chance that salmonella bacteria will attach to your blood vessels or the man-made joint. This could make you sicker than most people.

What are the symptoms of salmonella infection? — The symptoms include:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Fever – This usually lasts 2 or 3 days.
- Diarrhea that can be watery or bloody – This usually lasts 4 to 10 days. If you have diarrhea for more than 10 days, a different condition could be causing your symptoms.
- Belly pain

Should I see a doctor or nurse? — See your doctor or nurse if you:

- Have severe belly pain
- Cannot eat or drink
- Vomit blood or have blood in your bowel movements
- Have a fever higher than 100.4°F (38°C)

Is there a test for salmonella infection? — Yes. Your doctor or nurse can order tests on a sample of your bowel movement to check for salmonella bacteria. But it can take 2 or 3 days to get the test results. If you have a high risk of getting very sick from salmonella infection, your doctor or nurse might not wait for your test results before starting treatment.

How is salmonella infection treated? — It usually goes away on its own, so most people do not need treatment. But if you get very sick, you might be treated in the hospital. Doctors can give antibiotics through an "IV," a thin tube that goes into a vein.

If you have a high risk of getting very sick from salmonella infection, your doctor might prescribe antibiotic pills. You might need them for 2 weeks or even several months. The antibiotics help get rid of the infection and keep it from coming back.

Is there anything I can do on my own to feel better? — Yes. You can:

- Drink plenty of liquids — This keeps your body from losing too much water when you have diarrhea or vomit.
- Eat small meals that don't have a lot of fat in them.
- Rest if you feel tired.

Can salmonella infection be prevented? — Yes. You can lower the chances of getting or spreading the infection by:

- Washing your hands after changing diapers, going to the bathroom, blowing your nose, touching animals, or taking out the trash.
- Staying home from work or school if you are sick
- Paying attention to food safety. Tips include:
 - Don't drink unpasteurized milk or eat foods made with it
 - Wash fruits and vegetables well before eating them
 - Keep the refrigerator colder than 40°F (4.4°C) and the freezer below 0°F (-18°C)
 - Cook meat and seafood until well done
 - Cook eggs until the yolk is firm
 - Wash hands, knives, and cutting boards after they touch raw food

For more tips to on handling food safely, see the table ([table 1](#)).

What if I am pregnant? — If you think you might have salmonella infection, talk to your doctor, nurse, or midwife. Most pregnant women do not need treatment. But you might need it if you get very sick and are near your due date.

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GRAPHICS

Tips for safe food handling

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| Purchase |
| Do not buy already-cooked food that is stored next to raw food, even if it is stored on ice. |
| Do not buy food in cans that are dented, cracked, or have a bulging lid. |
| Storage |
| Make sure meat and poultry products are refrigerated when bought. |
| Use plastic bags to keep juices from meat and fish from touching other foods. |
| Store perishable items (that can go bad quickly) in the refrigerator within an hour of buying. |
| Keep refrigerator temperature between 32 and 40°F (0 and 4°C) and freezer temperature at or below 0°F (-18°C). |
| Freeze meat and poultry that will not be cooked within 48 hours. |
| Freeze tuna, bluefish, and mahi-mahi that will not be cooked within 24 hours. Other fish can be stored in the refrigerator for 48 hours. |
| Do not store eggs on the refrigerator door (since that is the warmest part of the refrigerator). |
| Put leftovers in the refrigerator within 2 hours of cooking them. |
| Divide leftovers into parts and store in small containers. |
| Reheat leftovers to 165°F (74°C) before eating. |
| Preparation |
| Wash hands with soap and water before cooking and after handling raw meat, poultry, fish, or raw eggs. |
| Thaw frozen meats and fish in the refrigerator or microwave, not by leaving them out. |
| Marinate foods in the refrigerator, not at room temperature. |
| Avoid contact of cooked foods with forks, spoons, knives, plates, or areas that might not be clean. |
| Wash forks, spoons, knives, plates, and cutting areas with soap and water after they have touched raw meat, poultry, fish, or eggs. |
| Avoid letting the juices from uncooked meat, poultry, or fish touch cooked foods or foods that will be eaten raw. |
| Carefully wash all fresh fruits and vegetables. |
| Avoid recipes that include raw eggs. |
| Cooking |
| Use a meat thermometer. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cook beef, veal, and lamb (eg, steaks, roasts, chops) to 145°F (63°C) and rest for 3 minutes. ▪ Cook ground beef, pork, veal, and lamb to 160°F (71°C). |

- Cook poultry (eg, chicken, turkey) to 165°F (74°C).
- Cook fresh pork (eg, roasts, chops, ham that is not precooked) to 145°F (63°C) and rest for 3 minutes.
- Cook precooked ham to 140°F (60°C).
- Cook fish until the flesh is firm and separates easily with a fork.
- Cook shellfish until the flesh is firm.

Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm.

Boil juices from raw meat or fish before using on cooked food.

Serving

Serve cooked foods on clean plates with clean forks, spoons, and knives.

Keep hot foods at 140°F (60°C) and cold foods below 40°F (4°C).

Never leave foods at room temperature longer than 2 hours, or 1 hour if the room is hotter than 90°F (32°C).

Use coolers and ice packs to take perishable foods (that might go bad) away from home.

United States Department of Agriculture. Food Safety. Available at <http://www.foodsafety.gov> (Accessed on January 19, 2016).

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