

# Food Poisoning

## What Is It?

Food poisoning is unpleasant even if it's a mild form. Symptoms are vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pains and headache, and they usually come on after a few hours but it can be a couple of days. It's caused by bacteria, viruses or substances contaminating food and can last from a few hours to weeks.

Food poisoning is the general name for a whole range of bacteria infections including salmonella and E-coli 0157. Mild forms usually clear up themselves; but severe ones can kill and young children, elderly people and pregnant women are particularly at risk. About 2 million cases occur in the UK in a year but many can be prevented by following the food hygiene rules above and not eating raw meat, fish, shellfish and eggs.

## What Do I Do?

If you've got mild food poisoning it usually rights itself if you take to your bed and keep drinking non-alcoholic beverages to prevent dehydration. If it hasn't cleared after a few days see your GP. They usually take a stool sample for analysis to find out which bacteria or virus it is and antibiotics can then be prescribed if appropriate. Food poisoning is rarely fatal - but it is unpleasant.

Lots of information about food hygiene and food poisoning at [Foodlink](#), a joint venture between the food industry and government and other public sector bodies. Try their '[dirty dozen](#)' hygiene game.

## Is Our Food Safe?

Food scares are forever hitting the papers. Mass outbreaks of E-coli food poisoning, BSE, salmonella in eggs, and the safety of GMOs to name a few. How do you judge what's safe?

It's hard to know what to do for the best and we have to accept that nothing in life is 100% safe. [The Food Standards Agency](#) was set up to help increase the safety of our food, and consumer confidence in it. It is the main body dealing with food surveillance, regulations and enforcement.

Day to day inspection and enforcement of food hygiene throughout the country is handled by environmental health staff at local councils. The Food Safety Act 1990 covers the sale of food for human consumption and various regulations cover detailed hygiene actions to be taken.