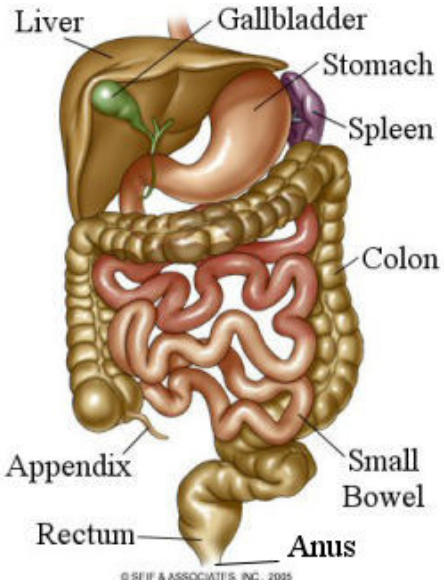
Campylobacter

Campylobacter is an inflammation of the intestine. It is an infection that is caused by a bacteria. Campylobacter bacteria normally inhabit the intestinal tract of all animals used for human food. This includes a variety of birds (including chicken, turkey and duck), and many wild animals. Animals used for food do not get sick from the bacteria, but their feces commonly contaminate their meat during the slaughtering process. Commercially raised poultry is nearly always colonized with these bacteria. Animal feces containing Campylobacter may also contaminate:

- Unpasteurized milk.
- Soil.
- Water.

This contamination can lead to spread of the bacteria to humans as well as their pet dogs and cats. Like other organisms that cause infections in humans, feces to mouth and person-to-person transmission can also occur.



SYMPTOMS

Symptoms usually start a day or two following ingestion of the bacteria. Typical symptoms include:

- Diarrhea.
- Fever.
- Belly (*abdominal*) cramps.

Diarrhea may range from a few loose stools to very watery or bloody stools. Symptoms are almost always self-limited. Most people find gradual resolution over several days. The illness lasts for longer than a week in up to 20% if patients. On occasion, abdominal pain associated with the infection may mimic that of appendicitis. However, diarrhea is not present in the majority of patients who do have appendicitis.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis requires laboratory culture tests of stool, which doctors may need to specifically request.

TREATMENT

- Virtually all persons infected will recover without specific treatment.
- Patients should drink plenty of fluids as long as the diarrhea lasts.
- Symptoms usually resolve before diagnosis of this infection is achieved, and antibiotics shorten the course of illness by only about a day. Your caregiver will decide if antibiotics are necessary.

COMPLICATIONS

Rarely, some long-term consequences can result. Some people may:

- Have arthritis.
- Develop a rare disease that affects the nerves of the body. It begins several weeks after the diarrheal illness. This disease, called Guillain-Barré syndrome, occurs when a person's immune system is “triggered” to attack the body's own nerves. This condition can lead to paralysis that lasts several weeks and usually requires intensive care. It is estimated that approximately one in every 1000 people with a Campylobacter infection will also develop Guillain-Barré syndrome. As many as 40% of Guillain-Barré syndrome cases in the US may be triggered by this infection.

PREVENTION

Use common sense kitchen hygiene practices.

- Cook all poultry products thoroughly:
  - Make sure that the meat is cooked throughout (no longer pink).

- Any juices run clear.
- The inside is cooked to 170° F (77° C) for breast meat.
- The inside is cooked 180° F (82° C) for thigh meat.

- If you are served undercooked poultry in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking.
- Wash hands with soap and water after handling raw foods of animal origin and before touching anything else.
- Prevent cross-contamination in the kitchen:
  - Use separate cutting boards for meat and poultry.
  - Carefully clean all cutting boards, countertops and utensils with soap and water after preparing raw food of animal origin.
- Avoid drinking unpasteurized milk and untreated surface water.
- Make sure that persons with diarrhea, especially children, wash their hands carefully and frequently with soap to reduce the risk of spreading the infection.
- Wash hands with soap and water after contact with pet and infant feces.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You are unable to keep fluids down.
- Vomiting or diarrhea develop and or become persistent.
- Abdominal pain increases or localizes.
- You develop a high fever, which is an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C) or as your caregiver suggests, for over 3 days.
- Diarrhea becomes excessive or contains increased blood or mucus.
- You experience excessive weakness, dizziness, fainting or extreme thirst.
- You experience significant weight loss. Check weight 2 to 3 times per day in babies and children will help verify adequate fluid replacement. Your caregiver will tell you what loss should concern you or suggest another visit to your personal physician.
- Record your weight today. Compare this to your home scale. Record all weights with the time and date. Try to check weight at the same times every day.

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