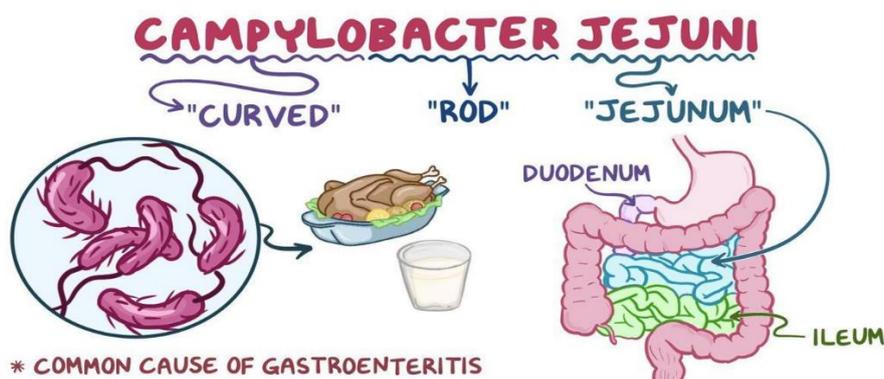


SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON CAMPYLOBACTER

What is Campylobacter?

Campylobacter is a germ that lives harmlessly in the gut of many animals & birds. It infects the gut of humans and is a common cause of diarrhoea in people of all ages. The disease is present all the year round but tends to be more common late spring and early summer.



Symptoms

The time taken from picking up Campylobacter to becoming ill is usually between 2 and 5 days but can be up to 11 days after exposure.

Campylobacter can cause a variety of symptoms including:

- Flu like illness
- Diarrhoea (may be blood stained)
- Headaches
- Stomach pains
- Feeling sick
- Vomiting (rarely)

The symptoms can be severe but usually settle within a week. In a small number of cases symptoms may take longer to settle. The illness is most unpleasant, but rarely life threatening, and normally settles without antibiotic treatment.

How did I catch it?

Campylobacter is spread by several means, for example from:

- *eating* contaminated food, eg eating undercooked meat or poultry

- *drinking dirty water, un-pasteurised milk or contaminated milk* -birds can infect milk by pecking through foil milk bottle tops.
- *pet dogs or cats or farm animals* who have the illness, especially if they have diarrhoea.
- *someone else who is ill* with the germ. Spread can occur when parents of an infected baby deal with soiled nappies and forget to wash their hands.

What is the treatment?

Generally, individuals with Campylobacter do not require treatment. They usually only need to take care to drink plenty water or other clear fluids.

The germ may take 2 to 7 weeks to clear out of the body so care should be taken not to infect others during this period – especially when there is still diarrhoea. 'Probiotic' drinks or foods (such as live yoghurt) can help to replace and restore the balance of 'good' bacteria in the gut.

What happens if my symptoms become severe?

If you have high fever and your diarrhoea and vomiting are intractable, or you are at higher risk from dehydration (for example have kidney disease) then you should speak to your GP.

A small proportion of patients are ill enough to need admission to hospital may be given intravenous fluids to correct dehydration. As soon as you feel able to you should eat and drink normally.

Other measures to consider while unwell?

While you are unwell you should:

- Ensure your hand are regularly and thoroughly washed.
- Hot wash any soiled garments.
- Avoid preparing food for others if possible

How will I know I am no longer infected?

Campylobacter disappears from the stools within a few weeks of illness. Once your symptoms settle, the germ will be present in only low numbers and good personal hygiene, including careful hand washing will prevent the spread of Campylobacter. There is no need to send further stool specimens.

Environmental Health

When you get home an Environmental Health Officer may be in touch. Their role is to try and establish where the infection came from and to answer any queries or give you further advice. This infection can only be controlled if we better understand how, it was passed on. This may help to stop others getting infected.

When can I go back to work/school/nursery?

Most people can return to work or school once their stools have returned to normal, as long as they are careful about hand washing. However, the following people must not return to work/school/nursery until any vomiting has ceased and stools have been normal for 48 hours (off treatment).

- Food handlers
- Care workers and nursery staff
- Children aged less than 5 years
- Those who are unable to maintain good hand hygiene, eg due to physical disability, learning difficulties or mental illness.

If you are uncertain whether you or your relatives fall into one of these groups, further advice is available from your local Environmental Health Department

How can I avoid getting it again?

The main ways to avoid getting Campylobacter are:

- *Wash hands thoroughly*, for example after handling animals; changing nappies; visiting the toilet; and before: cooking; handling food; feeding the young or elderly; eating
- *Prepare food safely*
 - Clean food preparation surfaces with detergent and warm water
 - Do not use the same chopping board/knife for raw meat or other foodstuffs without washing thoroughly
 - Defrost poultry, meat and other meat products well before cooking
 - Cook until the juices run clear and there are no pink bits inside
 - Follow manufacturer's instructions
 - Remember cooked meat is stored at the top of the fridge and uncooked meat at the bottom
 - Eat cooked food immediately or cool quickly and place in fridge or freezer
 - Run the fridge at 5°C or below
 - Re-heated foods should be piping hot
 - Avoid drinking milk from bottles with tops pecked by birds
 - Try to keep pets out of the kitchen
 - Lastly, thoroughly wash all salad vegetables
- *Thorough cooking* of poultry, eggs and meat – campylobacter is destroyed by heat.
- *Avoid drinking untreated milk and untreated water* (particularly abroad). Where possible avoid drinking water from rivers and streams. Consider using previously boiled water for drinks and tooth brushing with unchecked private water supplies.



If you have any further questions, then ask your pharmacist or GP for further advice.

Useful contacts

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - www.patient.co.uk
- NHS Choices, www.nhs.uk/conditions/

If you have further questions:

Call the **practice** on *01285 653184 or 01285 653122*

If you require **urgent** medical advice, call *111 (24 Hrs)*

In an **emergency** call *999*