

WORST-CASE SCENARIO®

HOW TO SURVIVE IF YOUR FOOD IS BEING POISONED

1

Induce vomiting.

Regurgitating the agent before it can be absorbed into the bloodstream will help to reduce its effects. If you cannot force yourself to vomit, take 1 tablespoon of syrup of ipecac, followed by a glass of water, soda, or juice. (Do not drink milk.) Vomiting should occur within a few minutes. If it does not, follow with a second tablespoon of the ipecac.

2

Take activated charcoal.

Drink a single, premixed container of activated charcoal slurry, or mix the powder with the proper amount of liquid (follow the instructions on the package) to absorb the poison. Do not take activated charcoal within 30 minutes of taking ipecac, or while vomiting is still occurring. Activated charcoal is most effective when administered in an emergency room.

3

Test food and drink promptly.

Take your meal to a lab and have it tested. Once the toxins are identified, an antidote, if available, and treatment can be administered. However, some exotic poisons such as dioxin, mercury, and other heavy metals may be difficult or impossible to detect, especially in low concentrations.

4 **Seek medical attention promptly.**

Call the local poison control center as soon as possible. Some remedies can be prescribed over the phone, without an examination. With an examination and blood, urine, and other tests, health-care professionals can determine the effects of the poison on your body.

Be Aware

- Poisons may be sedatives (or mixed with sedatives) to induce loss of consciousness. If you pass out but wake up later, do not assume the poison has worked its way out of your system.
- A percolating drink—or one that appears to be foaming or releasing quantities of odd-smelling gas—should be avoided. The chemical agent phosgene, for example, is an odorous poisonous gas at room temperature but may be a liquid when cooled.
- Depending on the agent, poison may be absorbed into the bloodstream in seconds or minutes.

In sufficient concentrations, several common poison agents are relatively easy to detect in food or drink, based on their odor. These include:

ARSINE

Type: blood agent

Odor: garlic

Timing of Symptoms: minutes or hours

Symptoms: may include headache, dizziness, difficulty breathing, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and bloody urine

CHLORINE

Type: choking agent

Odor: bleach

Timing of Symptoms: seconds to minutes

Symptoms: may include headache, nausea, weakness, and loss of consciousness (when ingested in high doses)

CYANIDE

Type: choking agent

Odor: bitter almonds

Timing of Symptoms: seconds to minutes

Symptoms: may include headache, nausea, weakness, anxiety, and loss of consciousness

HYDROGEN CHLORIDE

Type: blood agent

Odor: acrid, metallic

Timing of Symptoms: seconds to minutes

Symptoms: may include eye and skin irritation, fluid in the lungs, and blue skin (in high doses)

PHOSGENE

Type: choking agent

Odor: decaying fruit

Timing of Symptoms: 1 to 24 hours

Symptoms: may include burning eyes, sore throat, cough, and chest tightness