



 Please call 911 if you think you have a medical emergency.

P o i s o n i n g T r e a t m e n t

S e l f - C a r e a t H o m e

If you, a family member, or a friend has swallowed or breathed a poison and you have signs or symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, pain, trouble breathing, seizure, confusion, or abnormal skin color, then you must call either an ambulance or a poison control center for guidance.

As a rule, do not treat a poisoning at home.

- Identify your closest poison control center from a comprehensive list of toll-free telephone numbers for poison control centers in all states at the American Association of Poison Control Centers.
- Place the telephone number (along with police, fire, and 911 or equivalent) near your home phones.
- If you phone a poison control center, ask:
 - Is there an antidote I can give at home?

In the past, syrup of ipecac was recommended to induce vomiting. You should only give ipecac when told to do so by a medical professional. Recently, experts concluded that ipecac syrup should be used very rarely. Thus, the current first-line treatment for most ingested poisons is now activated charcoal, which works more quickly and effectively.

M e d i c a l T r e a t m e n t

- Elimination: Get rid of the unabsorbed poison before it can do any harm.
 - In rare cases, the physician may use ipecac to cause vomiting.
 - If the person is unconscious, the doctor will put a flexible, soft, plastic tube into the windpipe to protect the person from suffocating in his or her own vomit and to provide artificial breathing.
 - Once the poison has moved past the stomach, other methods are needed.

- Activated charcoal acts as a "super" absorber of many poisons. Once the poison is stuck to the charcoal in the intestine, the poison cannot get absorbed into the bloodstream. Activated charcoal has no taste, but the gritty texture sometimes causes the person to vomit. To be effective, activated charcoal needs to be given as soon as possible after the poisoning. It does not work with alcohol, caustics, lithium, or petroleum products.
- Whole bowel irrigation requires drinking a large quantity of a fluid called GoLYTELY. This flushes the entire gastrointestinal tract before the poison gets absorbed.
- Antidotes: Some poisons have specific antidotes. Antidotes either prevent the poison from working or reverse the effects of the poison.
 - Atropine is an antidote for certain nerve gases and insecticides. During Operation Desert Storm, all military personnel were issued atropine injectors when it was feared that Saddam Hussein would use nerve gas.
 - A common antidote is N-acetylcysteine (Mucomyst), which is used to neutralize Tylenol overdoses. Acetaminophen, in normal doses, is one of the safest medications known, but after a massive overdose, the liver is damaged, and hepatitis and liver failure develop. Mucomyst works as an antidote by bolstering the body's natural detoxification abilities when they are overwhelmed.
 - It may also be possible to reverse the harmful effect of a drug even if no antidote exists.
 - If a person with diabetes takes too much insulin, a dangerously low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) will cause weakness, unconsciousness, and eventually death. Sugar given by mouth or IV is an effective treatment until the insulin wears off.
 - When the poison is a heavy metal, such as lead, special medicines (chelators) bind the poison in the bloodstream and cause it to be eliminated in the urine.
 - Another "binder" is sodium polystyrene sulfonate (Kayexalate), which can absorb potassium and other electrolytes from the bloodstream.
- General supportive measures: When there are no specific treatments, the physician will treat signs and symptoms as needed.
 - If the person is agitated or hallucinating, a sedative can be given to calm the person until the drug wears off.
 - A ventilator can be used to breathe for anyone who has stopped breathing from a poisoning.
 - Antiseizure medicines can be used to treat or prevent seizures.

more information from eMedicineHealth

- [When to Seek Medical Care](#)
- [Exams and Tests](#)
- [Next Steps](#)
- [Outlook](#)

For more information, read the complete article, Poisoning (<http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=58837>) on <http://www.emedicinehealth.com>.

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