

Is it food poisoning or a virus?

Many people know the awful feeling of an upset stomach. It happens to almost everyone at least a few times in our lives. Many times, we blame the last thing we ate. But this is not always the cause.

It can be hard to know what made you sick. If you got food poisoning, it can take 24 hours or more to get sick from some germs. And if you caught a virus, it can take several days to get sick after you were exposed.



'STOMACH FLU' ISN'T THE FLU

Many people will say they had the "stomach flu" if they had a stomach virus. But the flu, or influenza, is not the same thing. The real flu rarely causes stomach problems in adults. Instead, it causes fever, coughing, headache and body aches.

Norovirus is a virus that often causes stomach symptoms. It spreads easily in crowded places, schools and daycares.



WHAT IS FOOD POISONING, ANYWAY?

Food poisoning happens when you eat or drink something that contains harmful germs.

If you were with others who ate the same food as you, they could get sick too. This is where it becomes hard to know if you have food poisoning or a viral infection. You can only get food poisoning through contaminated food. You get norovirus from other people.



SYMPTOMS LOOK THE SAME

Both viruses and food poisoning can cause:

- Stomach pain
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Headache
- Body aches
- Tiredness

WHICH ONE IS IT?

If there is a large outbreak of food poisoning, you may find out about it. It could be in the news if many people got sick. But often, you may never know if you had a stomach virus or food poisoning. The symptoms are very similar.

Sometimes doctors may run tests to find out what kind of illness you have. Usually, however, this isn't necessary.



TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

Most people get better on their own after a stomach illness. But if you're concerned, talk to your doctor. They can tell you what you should do based on your symptoms, age and health history.

If you're worried about serious dehydration or if the illness is severe, you should get medical help right away.

Source: American Academy of Family Physicians