

Clostridium difficile (C. diff) infection

Clostridium difficile (C. diff) is a type of bacteria that can cause diarrhoea. It often affects people who have been taking antibiotics. It can usually be treated with a different type of antibiotic.

Check if you have a C. diff infection

Common symptoms of a C. diff infection include:

- diarrhoea
- a high temperature
- loss of appetite
- feeling sick
- a stomach ache

How you get a C. diff infection

C. diff bacteria usually live harmlessly in your bowel along with lots of other types of bacteria.

But sometimes when you take antibiotics, the balance of bacteria in your bowel can change, causing an infection.

When someone has a C. diff infection, it can spread to other people very easily if the bacteria found in the person's poo get onto objects and surfaces.

Who's at risk

You're more likely to get a C. diff infection if:

- you're over 65 years
- you're taking, or have recently taken, antibiotics
- you're staying in hospital or a care home for a long time
- you have a weakened immune system – for example, from having a long-term condition like diabetes or kidney failure, or treatment like chemotherapy
- you're taking a proton pump inhibitor (PPI), such as [omeprazole](#), or other medicines that reduce stomach acid
- you've had a C. diff infection in the past

Urgent advice: Ask for an urgent GP appointment or get help from NHS 111 if:

- you have diarrhoea and you're taking, or have recently taken, antibiotics
 - you have bloody diarrhoea or bleeding from the bottom
 - you have diarrhoea for more than 7 days
- You can call 111 or [get help from 111 online](#).

Treatments for a C. diff infection

If a doctor thinks you have a C. diff infection, they may ask for a sample of your poo to be tested.

The infection can sometimes be treated at home, or you might need to go into hospital. This is because C. diff infections can sometimes lead to more serious problems like [sepsis](#).

A C. diff infection is treated by:

- stopping any antibiotics you're taking, if possible
- taking a 10-day course of another antibiotic that can treat the C. diff infection

You'll also be given advice about how to avoid dehydration, such as making sure you drink plenty of water.

Your symptoms should improve a few days after starting the new course of antibiotics. But it may be 1 to 2 weeks before the infection clears up completely.

Go back to see the GP if your symptoms get worse, you feel very unwell after starting the antibiotics, or your symptoms come back afterwards.

If your symptoms return, treatment may need to be repeated.

If the C. diff infection comes back 2 or more times, you may be offered a faecal microbiota transplant. This is where bacteria from a healthy person's poo is put into your gut to help stop the infection.

Important

Carry on taking your antibiotics until you've finished all your tablets, capsules or liquid, even

if you feel better. If you stop your treatment early, your symptoms could come back.

How to prevent spreading a C. diff infection

C. diff infections can spread very easily. There are some things you can do to reduce the risk of passing it on to others.

Do

- stay at home until at least 48 hours after your diarrhoea stops
- wash your hands regularly using soap and water
- clean the toilet and area around it with disinfectant after each use

Don't

- wash clothes and sheets with poo on separately from other washing at the highest possible temperature
- do not share towels and flannels
- do not take medicine to stop diarrhoea like [loperamide](#) because it can prevent the infection being cleared from your body

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