

Poison Prevention Press

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What To Do Instead

If you or someone else experiences a poisoning, follow our **first aid steps** and then call 1-800-222-1222 to speak with a poison specialist.

First Aid for Poisonings

Swallowed Poison:

- Gently wipe out mouth and give a small amount of water.
- Do not make the person vomit.

Poison on the Skin:

- Remove contaminated clothing and jewelry.
- Rinse skin with lukewarm water for 10 minutes.

Poison in the Eye:

- Flush the eye with lukewarm water from cup, faucet, or shower for 15 minutes.
- Do not force the eyelid open.

Inhaled Poison:

- Get the person to fresh air.
- Open doors and windows.

Did you know that...

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) officially stopped recommending that households keep Syrup of Ipecac for poisonings in 2003?

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Home Remedies People Use for Poisonings (But Shouldn't!)

The majority of poisoning cases managed by the Maryland Poison Center (MPC) occur in the home. The good news is that with the help of an MPC poison specialist, most of these cases can be managed safely at home. The bad news is that trying to treat a poisoning at home by yourself with outdated home remedies can make some cases worse.

Inducing Vomiting

Inducing vomiting is not recommended and has not been shown to help in poisonings. In fact, it can make things worse. When a person vomits, the poison swallowed comes back up through the throat and out of the mouth. This exposes those areas to the harmful substance for a second time and can cause more damage. Vomiting also increases the risk of choking and getting the swallowed poison into the lungs. This is especially dangerous if the person swallowed:

- Oil-based products such as citronella oil, reed diffuser oil, and air freshener oil
- Corrosive products such as toilet bowl cleaner
- Gasoline
- Medicines that make you drowsy

Some things commonly consumed to induce vomiting that are **not** recommended are:

- Syrup of Ipecac
- Mustard water
- Salt solutions
- Raw egg whites

Milk

Many people drink milk after swallowing something harmful because they believe it can soothe the throat or stomach and treat the poisoning. However, milk is not a medicine and does not treat poisoning. Always call the MPC for treatment advice for your specific situation. Based on what was swallowed, a poison specialist may suggest drinking water, juice, or milk. Keep in mind that these drinks do not have special healing powers - they will simply help dilute or rinse out what was swallowed.

Activated Charcoal

Activated charcoal, when used correctly, can bind to certain toxins in the body and prevent them from being absorbed. It is sometimes used in hospitals or by other health care providers to treat certain types of poisonings. However, charcoal does not only bind to poisons - it can also absorb prescription medicines and helpful bacteria. If the charcoal absorbs an important medicine, it may stop that medicine from working and cause new health problems. Capsules of activated charcoal in stores often contain much less of the substance than the amount a health care professional could provide. **Activated charcoal should not be used at home. It should only be given to you by a health care provider who has evaluated your situation.**

Baking Soda

Baking soda can help reduce stomach acid and may give short-term relief or heartburn or indigestion. This is why some people drink it after swallowing poisons such as household cleaning products or other chemicals. This is not a safe choice, can make the situation worse, and can lead to serious side effects.

Drinking Excessive Amounts of Water

Some people drink large amounts of water to "dilute" a poison or to flush medicines out of the body. This is not recommended. Drinking too much water can cause its own health problems and may make the situation worse. In some cases, a poison specialist may suggest taking small sips of water or another drink. The advice a poison specialist gives depends on what was swallowed and the person's age, weight, symptoms, and more.