

Steer clear of roadside food this season

Eating a plate of pani puri from your street-corner bhaiya, or a plate of cold fruit salad to beat the heat may not be such a good idea this season as a host of gastrointestinal and stomach infections are already making the rounds in Bangalore.

Virus, bacteria and other micro organisms might just be lurking in those tasty concoctions that we all feel so tempted to get our hands on, and if infected, you may have to make several trips to doctors as acute gastroenteritis (GE) could get you.

Dr George Alexander, consultant gastroenterologist, Columbia Asia Hospital, says the ailment causes severe dehydration and exhaustion.

Describing the earliest symptoms, he says, "Severe loose motion and stomach cramps, diarrhoea, fever and vomiting are the signs. A stool analysis will show pus cells, and stool culture will reveal specific infections."

While acute GE is now common as a standalone infection, GI infections are also part of typhoid and dengue, he says. "These organisms infect us through contaminated food and water, and they are very active during this season. So avoid eating from unhygienic roadside vendors and unclean restaurants. It is also very important to wash your hands thoroughly before and after eating."

The infection can also spread within families through the faeco-oral route. If a person does not clean his hands properly after using the toilet, the infection can spread, says Dr Alexander.

Apart from unhygienic food, bacteria causing gastroenteritis may be present in pork, dairy products, meat, eggs, water in swimming pools and also in ground beef, salads and poultry.



WHEN TO SEE THE DOC

It depends on the duration and severity of the problem. If a person experiences high fever or dehydration that does not subside with home medication and persists for more than five days, then it is time to see the doctor. If there is blood in the stools, see the doctor immediately.

"As uncomfortable as diarrhoea may be, it is usually short-lived. Drink enough fluids, follow your doctor's instructions, and you will feel better in no time," Dr Sandur adds.

HOW TO PREVENT BACTERIAL GASTROENTERITIS

- Avoid unpasteurised milk, raw meat or shellfish
- Use different chopping boards for raw and cooked meat
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before preparing salads
- While storing foods for more than a couple of hours, make sure temperatures are either very hot or very cold
- Keep your kitchen clean, wash your hands after using the toilet, handling food, touching animals and before eating
- Always carry bottled water during travel
- Take vaccines recommended by your physician

SYMPTOMS YOU EXPERIENCE COULD INCLUDE:

- loss of appetite
- nausea and vomiting
- diarrhoea
- abdominal pain and cramps
- blood in the stools
- high grade fever

TIPS TO TREAT MILD BACTERIAL GASTROENTERITIS AT HOME

- Drink fluids at regular intervals throughout the day, especially after an episode of diarrhoea
- Eat small meals in shorter spans of time and include salty meals
- Eat potassium-rich foods, juices and bananas
- Always consult your doctor before taking medicine
- If you are not able to retain fluids in your body, you need to visit a hospital
- Wash your hands thoroughly before handling food and avoid preparing food as it may spread the infection
- Wait for 48 hours after your symptoms stop before returning to work

try.

The ideal diet for an infected person is bland food with absolutely no oil. "Infected people will suffer from dehydration, and fluid intake becomes very important. Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) is a must," he says.

It is important to see which part of the gastrointestinal tract is affected, says Dr Dinesh Kini, director - Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Sakra World Hospital. How does one find that out?

"If the small intestine is affected, it will lead to watery explosive stools more than 10 times a day, without blood or mucus. It is an indication that the large intestine is infected if the patient has four to five stools in semi-solid form with mucus or even blood," he says.

Dr Ravindra B S, senior consultant, Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Therapeutic Endoscopy, BGS Global Hospitals, warns of eating food outside this season as you may also con-

tract jaundice - hepatitis A and E - or typhoid.

"Those with diarrhoea should take plenty of water, tender coconut, curd rice, butter milk, idlis, rice and dal. People suffering from jaundice should avoid oily and spicy foods and meat. Aerated drinks and alcohol are also a big no," he advises.

CHILDREN, BE EXTRA CAREFUL

The season can turn ugly for kids who are likely to contract

stomach infections, says Dr Veerendra Sandur, consultant in Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Fortis Hospital. "Rotavirus is the most common cause of gastroenteritis in children. Viruses cause about 70 per cent of episodes of infectious diarrhoea in the paediatric age group," he says.

"Parents should immediately consult a doctor if the child does not show any improvement in two days. If a child over three months of age continues to vomit even 12

hours after starting home remedies, or if an infant of less than 90 days has diarrhoea or vomiting, you should call your doctor," he says.

Adults who are recovering may try sipping broth or soup and fruit juices with no added sugar. "At a later stage, try soft fruits or vegetables, but avoid milk products as well as fatty, high fibre or sweet foods until the diarrhoea subsides. Soft drinks aggravate the diarrhoea," he says.

— Sharadha Kalyanam