

# QUICK FACTS: CONSEQUENCES & AFTERMATH

When a foodborne outbreak occurs, companies will rally and recover. Families, however, don't. They never fully recover. If there's a death, there will always be an empty chair at the table. One thing we take very seriously at Stop Foodborne Illness—and have tremendous passion for—is helping individuals and families cope with and triumph over the difficult, painful, and devastating aftermath of foodborne disease. If you've been impacted by foodborne illness, we're dedicated to helping you.

## Long-Term Consequences

**Kidney Failure/HUS** or (hemolytic-uremic syndrome) occurs when an infection in the digestive system produces toxic substances destroying red blood cells. Those who have suffered from HUS may be at risk for other kidney-related problems later in life, and should have blood (kidney function), urine (protein levels), and blood pressure (possible high BP due to kidney scarring) checkups annually.

**Chronic Arthritis** Some people with foodborne infections develop reactive arthritis which causes pain in their joints, irritation of the eyes, and painful urination. Arthritic inflammation can last for months or years and lead to chronic arthritis, which is difficult to treat. See our factsheets on Reactive Arthritis.

**Brain/Nerve Damage** Listeria infections can lead to inflammation of the membranes surrounding the brain. Newborns or fetuses infected with Listeria may have long-term consequences including seizures, paralysis, blindness, or deafness. Foodborne bacterial infections can also precipitate Guillain-Barré syndrome — a rare disorder that occurs when a person's immune system attacks the body's own nerves, resulting in possible paralysis lasting several weeks and requiring intensive care.

## Aftermath of Foodborne Illness

### Physical Health Challenges

that can arise due to food poisoning include high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney damage, chronic arthritis, Guillain-Barré syndrome, brain and neurological issues, a compromised immune system, and more.

### Getting Help

**Be Your Own Best Health Advocate:** Not all medical professionals are well-versed in foodborne illness-related issues. Commit yourself to becoming an expert on your specific health challenges and needs, and finding the most competent professionals who can best treat you.

**Be Diligent About Self-Care:** Good self-care includes eating healthy, fresh, whole foods; moving your body (as best you can); keeping stress at bay; and doing the simple things that help you feel calm, soothed, and less overwhelmed such as praying, doing yoga, sipping tea or broth, reading a book, taking long walks, or enjoying a warm bath. Good self-care does wonders for accelerating the body's ability to heal itself.

**Talk to Other Survivors:** We often hear that fellow survivors are the #1 source of support and information for those struggling with the aftermath of a foodborne illness because they've already "walked that road". They can give sound advice on finding a new normal as well as finding diagnostic and treatment information.

**Recruit Other Advocates:** Reach out to friends, family, health professionals you trust, religious leaders, and other advocates to get support, ask questions, gather helpful resources, learn more, and perhaps find, or be, a listening ear.



[stopfoodborneillness.org](http://stopfoodborneillness.org)



# CONSEQUENCES & AFTERMATH

## **Emotional Health Challenges** are common among those impacted by foodborne illness:

For example, grieving over a loved one, or the loss of your own health, financial security, social life, identity; Feeling angry or betrayed about how your life has changed; Suffering depression, making it harder to be motivated to do things you once enjoyed.

### **Getting Help**

**Seek Professional Counseling:** For people experiencing extreme challenges like severe depression, post-traumatic stress, or panic attacks, meeting with a professional counselor provides a high level of expert care in a one-on-one format.

**Connect on Social Media:** Among the simplest, most powerful ways to get support, learn a lot, and make new friends is via Facebook and other social media. In addition to STOP's page, did you know there's a Facebook support group for victims of HUS and their families?

**Attend a Support Group:** STOP has a monthly group online, or try inspire.com, or an in-person group based in your community.

**Keep a Journal:** Writing thoughts and feelings in a dedicated journal can be therapeutic. Journaling has been shown to improve immunity and reduce stress.

## **Social Life Challenges** happen when people are struck with a foodborne illness.

This brings a little change — or sometimes a lot. Maintaining positive relationships can be tougher. Once enjoyable activities like cooking and eating out can bring on worry, fear, and panic. For some, they become downright scary.

### **Getting Help**

**Be Patient with Yourself:** Process what you're going through —feeling stable one day and angry the next. Give yourself permission to heal at your own pace and progress on your own timeline.

**Communicate, Communicate, Communicate:** Open communication is the key. Be honest and open about your feelings, fears, and needs with the people you love. Those closest to you will understand your need for compassion, space, and patience.

**Educate Yourself on Food Safety:** Learning how to mitigate the risks can be a huge help when it comes to overcoming the fear you may have developed around eating or cooking.

**Become a Food Safety Advocate:** Time and again we're told that advocating for safe food is very empowering — turning something that was traumatic into something good. And helping others prevent the tragedy of foodborne disease can really give one a sense of purpose.

**Financial Challenges** often mean a heavy financial burden. Expenses abound for things like medical care, therapy, medications or funeral costs. These challenges also include lost wages due to an inability to work.

### **Getting Help**

**Contact Nonprofit Organizations** that offer financial grants and other assistance to people in need. Visit [www.needhelp-payingbills.com](http://www.needhelp-payingbills.com) for more.

**Reach Out to Your Community:** Government officials, religious bodies, and community groups may have local emergency funds or other financial assistance you might qualify for.

**Launch a Campaign:** A crowdfunding site like [spotfund.com](http://spotfund.com) or [givebutter.com](http://givebutter.com) may help when one has crisis medical costs.



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In 2008, Dr. Robert Tauxe of the CDC said, "Folks often assume once you're over the acute illness, that's it, you're back to normal and that's the end of it. Unfortunately, that's not always the case."