

Poisons

First, get the rest of whatever your baby has swallowed away from him. Then try to make him spit out anything left in his mouth. Keep a sample — unless you have the container — in case it's needed to identify the poison. Call 911 immediately if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Severe throat pain
- Burns on the lips or mouth
- Convulsions
- Unconsciousness
- Extreme sleepiness

Do not try to make your baby vomit. If your baby has swallowed a strong acid, such as toilet bowl cleaner, or a strong alkali, such as drain or oven cleaner, vomiting could further injure him by bringing the burning substance back up through his throat and mouth.

What if my baby doesn't seem to be seriously ill?

If your baby doesn't have any of the serious symptoms listed above, call your local poison control center. If you don't have the number handy, call the American Association of Poison Control Centers at (800) 222-1222 to be automatically redirected to your local poison control center.

Experts at the poison center will need to know your baby's approximate weight, any medical conditions he may have, any medications he's taking, and as much information about the substance he swallowed as you can give. If possible, have the container with you when you make the call. The poison center may need to know the ingredients listed on the label. If your baby has swallowed something like part of a plant, describe it as completely as you can.

If your baby has swallowed prescription or over-the-counter medication, have the container handy so you can provide all the necessary information. If you can, estimate the maximum number of pills your baby could have swallowed by subtracting any pills you can account for from the original number in the bottle.

Experts used to tell parents to keep either syrup of ipecac or activated charcoal on hand for poisoning emergencies, but the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) is no longer recommending that ipecac be kept in the house. Ipecac is not an effective treatment for poisoning — most emergency rooms don't even use it anymore — and activated charcoal hasn't been proven a safe or effective remedy to give to children at home.

If you have ipecac in your home, the AAP recommends that you dispose of it immediately and safely. (Never throw away any medications in a garbage can that your baby has access to.)

What if my baby gets poison on his skin?

Remove any affected clothes and rinse the exposed skin with lukewarm water. If the skin looks burned, continue rinsing for at least 15 minutes. Call the poison center for more advice.

What if something toxic splashes into my baby's eye?

Immediately flush your baby's eye with lukewarm water. This may not be easy if your baby is upset or frightened. If another adult is present, ask for help holding your baby while you run the water toward the inside of the eye to flush out the toxic substance. If you're alone, wrap your baby tightly in a towel or blanket and hold him under one arm. Flush the eye by pouring lukewarm water gently into the inner corner. Try to hold the eyelids open or get your baby to blink. Reassure your baby while you continue flushing the eye for 15 minutes. If your baby splattered the substance on other body parts as well, you might want to give him a shower instead. (You can get in with him to help him through this.) Then call the poison center.

What if my baby is exposed to toxic fumes?

Get your baby into the fresh air as quickly as possible. If your baby isn't breathing, start CPR immediately. If possible, ask someone else to call 911. If you're alone, perform CPR for one minute, then call 911. Resume CPR immediately and continue until help arrives or your baby begins breathing on his own.

If your baby has been exposed to toxic fumes but doesn't seem to be affected by it, talk with his doctor. She'll ask you the details and direct you to take any further steps.

Are there other poisons I should be concerned about?

Yes. Lead poisoning is a concern if your home was built before 1980. Most often children will ingest lead in paint chips or inhale lead dust during renovations. Lead poisoning can cause problems with cognitive and physical development and behavior.

Carbon monoxide poisoning is responsible for more fatalities than any other accidental poisoning in the United States. A colorless, odorless gas, carbon monoxide can seep through your home if you have an appliance that's malfunctioning or that isn't properly installed. Babies and children will show symptoms before the adults in the household. Early signs are headache, dizziness, and sleepiness, but these may be hard to detect in a baby. As the exposure continues, nausea, vomiting, heart palpitations, unconsciousness, and even death are possible. It's a good idea to install a carbon monoxide detector in your home and to test it regularly, along with your smoke detectors.

How can I prevent poisonings?

Over half of all poisonings occur among children under 6 years of age, and 90 percent of them happen at home. The most common household poisons are cosmetics, personal care products, cleaning supplies, pain relievers, and plants. Poison-proof your house, even before your baby becomes mobile. Keep all potential poisons locked up and out of your baby's reach. Use safety latches on all drawers and cabinets that contain dangerous substances or objects, and buy medicines with child-resistant caps. When you have visitors in your home, make sure that they keep their potentially poisonous substances out of reach. As diligent as you are, if Grandma comes over and leaves her medication on the nightstand, your baby won't be safe from poisoning.

Never put harmful substances into any containers, such as empty juice bottles, that look as if they're holding something your baby eats or drinks. Don't keep toothpaste, soap, shampoo, or other commonly used items in the same cabinet as dangerous products. Ask a nursery or plant store whether any of the plants you have around the house or yard are poisonous and consider removing those that are. Keep houseplants well out of reach. For more tips, see our article on poison proofing.

Post the phone numbers for the poison center and other emergency contacts near every telephone in your home. Be sure all your babysitters know where to find the emergency phone numbers.