

# Triad NEWSLETTER

SAFETY, CRIME PREVENTION, AND  
HEALTHY LIVING FOR OLDER ADULTS

- SPRING 2025 -



## Senior Abuse: Recognizing, Reporting, and Treating the Effects

David Wakely, Ph.D., retired clinical psychologist, Triad Volunteer

Senior abuse is a serious and often overlooked issue that affects millions of older adults across the world. It can take many forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, financial, and neglectful abuse. This abuse often occurs in the context of caregiver relationships, whether in the home, nursing homes, or other long-term care facilities. While the abuser may be a family member, a caregiver, or even a healthcare professional, the effects of this abuse can be devastating for the individual involved.

### What is Senior Abuse?

Senior abuse is any intentional act or failure to act that causes harm, distress, or risk of harm to an older person. It may include physical abuse, such as hitting, slapping, or restraining, as well as emotional abuse, which involves verbal threats, humiliation, or isolation. Financial abuse occurs when someone takes advantage of a senior's finances, often through fraud,

manipulation, or theft. Neglect, which is another common form of abuse, happens when a caregiver fails to provide basic needs such as food, water, shelter, or medical care. In some cases, sexual abuse may also occur.

One of the challenges with senior abuse is that many victims are reluctant to report it



due to fear, shame, or dependency on the abuser for care. Others may not even recognize that they are being abused, for example among seniors struggling with Alzheimer's or other dementias, especially when the abuse is subtle

or occurs gradually.

### Recognizing Symptoms of PTSD in Senior Abuse Victims

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can develop after an individual experiences or witnesses a traumatic event. Senior abuse, especially if it is prolonged or severe, can lead to the development of PTSD. In seniors, the

symptoms may not always be as apparent as they are in younger people, but they are still very real and can significantly affect well-being.

Some of the most common symptoms of PTSD in individuals who have experienced abuse include:

- **Intrusive thoughts or memories:** Victims may have recurrent, involuntary memories or flashbacks of the abuse. They might become easily startled or have nightmares related to the traumatic events.
- **Hypervigilance:** This involves being constantly on edge or excessively alert to possible threats, even in safe environments. The person may be jumpy, anxious, or overly cautious.
- **Avoidance behaviors:** The abused individual may try to avoid people, places, or situations that remind them of the trauma, including avoiding social activities or interactions with certain individuals.
- **Emotional numbness:** They may experience feelings of detachment or loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities. This is often a defense mechanism used to cope with overwhelming emotions.
- **Depression and anxiety:** Feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a constant sense of worry are common among those with PTSD due to abuse.

Recognizing these symptoms is crucial for early intervention and treatment. Family members, caregivers, and healthcare providers should be mindful of changes in behavior, mood, or physical condition in

seniors under their care.

## How to Avoid or Report Senior Abuse

Preventing senior abuse requires vigilance, education, and a commitment to providing proper care for the seniors. Here are some ways to avoid senior abuse and ensure the safety of older adults:

1. **Education and awareness:** It is important to educate both caregivers and families about what constitutes abuse, the warning signs, and how to provide appropriate care. Training in communication, empathy, and proper care techniques can go a long way in preventing abuse.
2. **Screening of caregivers:** Whether the caregiver is a family member or a paid professional, it is important to screen for any history of abusive behavior, criminal background, or other warning signs of potential harm to senior individuals.
3. **Open communication:** Regular communication between the individual, family members, and caregivers is essential. Encouraging the person to express concerns about their care and making sure they feel comfortable speaking up can help prevent abuse from going unnoticed.
4. **Reporting abuse:** If abuse is suspected or identified, it is critical to report it immediately. Dane County maintains an Elder Abuse/Neglect Unit. It is staffed M-F, 7:45 AM – 4:30 PM at (608) 261-9933. If the abuse occurs outside Dane County, call 1 (800) 677-1116. Outside of posted hours, Dane County Department of Human Services also



maintains a 24-hour mental health crisis line at: (608) 280-2600. Reporting the abuse can help protect the abused person from further harm. In cases of physical or sexual abuse, it is also important to contact law enforcement authorities.

**5. Creating a supportive environment:**

Providing a safe and supportive environment for seniors is one of the most effective ways to prevent abuse. Regular visits from family, friends, or social workers can help ensure that the senior's needs are met and that they are not isolated or vulnerable to exploitation.

## Treatment Options for the Effects of Abuse

For individuals who have experienced abuse, especially those suffering from PTSD, treatment is essential for healing. While recovery may be challenging, there are several treatment options available that can help mitigate the effects of trauma.

**1. Psychotherapy (Counseling):**

One of the most effective treatments for PTSD is psychotherapy, particularly trauma-focused therapy. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is often used to help individuals process the trauma, challenge negative thought patterns, and develop healthier coping mechanisms.

**2. Medication:** Medications such as antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs may be prescribed to manage symptoms of depression, anxiety, or insomnia associated with PTSD. These medications are often used in conjunction with therapy to support the individual's recovery.

**3. Support Groups:** Joining a support

group where individuals can share their experiences with others who have gone through similar situations can be incredibly therapeutic. These groups provide emotional support and help reduce feelings of isolation.

**4. Caregiver Support:** For seniors recovering from abuse, support for caregivers is also crucial. Caregivers who understand the trauma a person has experienced can provide better emotional and physical support during the recovery process.

**5. Social Services:** Social services can help with case management, ensuring that the person's needs for food, housing, and medical care are met. Social workers can also assist with finding additional resources and support systems.

## Conclusion

Senior abuse is a serious issue that can have long-lasting effects on an individual's physical and mental health. Recognizing the signs of abuse, understanding the symptoms of PTSD, and knowing how to report and find appropriate treatment are essential steps in protecting and supporting the abused. Preventive measures, such as caregiver screening, education, and creating open lines of communication, can help reduce the risk of abuse. For those who have suffered abuse, therapy, medication, and support groups can help them heal and regain a sense of security and dignity.

If these points have relevance to you personally, start by speaking with your primary medical provider. PTSD treatment is recognized as a covered service in most health plans. As a society, it is our responsibility to ensure that our senior loved ones are treated with the respect, care, and protection they deserve.

# Packaging Rage

By Pam Lewis, Triad Volunteer

Have you ever brought home a brand new purchase only to struggle with getting it out of its clamshell or other diabolical packaging? You're not alone. In fact, there's a name for it: *wrap rage* or *packaging rage*. Not only frustrating, it's led to injuries, even emergency room visits. Injuries can come from sharp-bladed tools or from shards of plastic or other fragments that result from attempts to liberate the contents of the package.

It turns out there are tools and strategies designed with safety and ergonomics in mind, which can help, for example, blades that retract when pressure is lifted and handles that can easily be gripped. Such features make things safer and more comfortable, and you actually can open the package without weeping and gnashing of teeth.

All of the items mentioned below are available at Amazon. And some, like spoons and can openers, you may already have!

## Vacuum-sealed jars

Use something to grip the lid, for example, the *Norpro Nonslip Rubber Jar Opener*. There are others at Amazon if you search for "gripper pad to open jars."

I usually go right for the *Jar Key*. Hook the bottom part under the rim of the lid and press down on the upper, circular part. This will break the vacuum, and the lid will unscrew more easily. If needed, you can then use the *Norpro*, above, to unscrew the lid.

If you have a lid that the *Jar Key* will not fit, you can run the lid under hot water, which causes the metal to expand a bit and break the vacuum.

Or you can use the handle end of a (non-sharp) table knife to tap the lid in a few places around the edge, so that the lid becomes slightly deformed which also breaks the vacuum.



## Cardboard boxes

Use the *OpenX Dual Blade Package Opener*. It is safer than a box-cutter, but I found it to be as effective. The blade is very small and sharp, and the handle is easy to hold. The blade is pushed out

using a sliding button and the blade retracts automatically when you are not pushing on the sliding button.

## Clamshell packaging

First check the sides for tabs that could be easily pulled apart, or other aids. These are rare, but occasionally you might find them.

Otherwise:

### Manual can opener method

Place the package face down. Use a manual rotary can opener. Clamp it to the right side and glide the can opener around the edge of the package as if opening a can. You might have to re-position the can opener at the corners. The two halves will separate easily, and the item is easily accessed. There's an explanation with pictures at

<https://www.wikihow.com/Open-Rigid-Plastic-Clamshell-Packages-Safely>

I also found a YouTube video of someone failing to get the can opener to work, so you might want to try the following:

### Cut with blade method

You could use a knife or scissors blade between the two sides and cut around the package. If you use a knife, the point is inside, which is safer (for both you and the item) than just stabbing at the package.

The above link shows this method as well

<https://www.wikihow.com/Open-Rigid-Plastic-Clamshell-Packages-Safely>

## **Safety seals around top of a bottle**

There's usually a perforated part where it is most effective to cut. Use the *OpenX* (see above) tool.

## **Safety seals under cap of a bottle**

### Paper or foil

Use the *Slice Safety Cutter* with *Slice Ceramic Blade* (it's small, you can put it on your key chain). Cut an X on the paper or foil, then insert your finger and peel it all off.

### Pull-tab ring

These may be found on half-gallon cardboard containers of milk. Use an ordinary spoon. With it facing toward you,

insert the handle into the ring, then pull forward on the bowl of the spoon and it will pop right out.

## **Flip-top cans**

Use an ordinary spoon. With it facing toward you and moving from outer edge of can toward center, slip the spoon handle into the ring and use the handle to lift up the tab, then use the bowl of the spoon to lift up the lid. For a video, Google "Can Opening Hack with a Spoon."

## **Caps attached to ring underneath**

You have to separate the cap from the ring, for example, on bottles of olive oil. With one hand holding only the ring part, unscrew the cap with your other hand. Using the *Norpro* gripper (see above) with the hand twisting the cap might help and will protect your hand.

## **Child-proof pill bottles**

Place the pill bottle on a non-slip surface such as the *Norpro Nonslip Rubber Jar Opener*, mentioned above, and place another on top of the pill bottle. Then lean on the top to push down and at the same time, twist left to open it. (Remember Lefty-Loose-y, Righty-Tight-y?)

If you don't have small children around, you can ask your pharmacist for non-child-proof pill bottles for your prescriptions.

## **Toilet Bowl Cleaner**

Full disclosure: I once used pliers to open one. The directions are lightly embossed on the top and difficult to read even if you know they're there. Grip the base of the cap with thumb and 2nd or 3rd finger so they are on opposite sides and at the same time twist left.

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# My Unusual Volunteer Job

By Jim Jenkins, Triad Volunteer

I have an out-of-the-ordinary, but quite interesting, RSVP volunteer job. For about four hours a week, I volunteer at the Madison Police Department (MPD). I contact people who've submitted complaints to the police after being victimized in property crimes, scams and frauds. I've been doing this since about 2018.

I retired in 2003 after thirty-two years in State of Wisconsin law enforcement. In that career, I investigated a variety of crimes, and I thoroughly enjoyed the job. My volunteer work with MPD lets me keep a toe in the water doing what I love: meeting people, helping them solve their problems and giving them tips on how to avoid being victimized in the future.

I talk to the victim, for example, the victim of a scam, and gather additional information and send it along to the detective supervisor who assigned the incident to me. The supervisor will then decide whether to pass it on to a detective for additional follow-up. Whether it does or not all depends on the amount of loss, various solvability factors and the volume of work detectives are experiencing.

Most of the things I call people about won't likely be assigned to a detective for investigation. Crimes like car break-ins,

bike thefts, lost or stolen phones, wallets, credit cards and so on. Often there are no witnesses, no video, and no physical evidence.

Also, in each contact, I talk to the victim about ways to protect their property, protect their credit and identity, and make insurance claims. Often, I help victims contact another agency that might be able to help them. People feel overwhelmed when they fear their identity or credit are threatened, and I try to help them move forward. Volunteer reports, to the victim, may not seem to go anywhere, but they are very important because they go on file and can help police analysts spot emerging trends or upticks in crime in neighborhoods.

Mainly, I provide a friendly and sympathetic ear. I try to represent the MPD in a positive light.

I look forward to the days that I volunteer with the MPD. I work alongside lots of friendly, welcoming people, who are skilled and dedicated to their work. In a small way, I free them for more complex cases and provide the department with a bit of positive public relations. Most important, I hope that the contacts I make help the victims feel a little more secure going forward. That's the point of it all.

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(From page 5, Packaging Rage)

## Blister Packs

Pills often come in these. The paper on the back of these breaks easily when you push the pill through from the front. That's all there is to it.

## Zip ties/Cable ties

Cutting with a scissors is easiest. There is a specific tool for zip ties, if you want to save and re-use them, but I found it very difficult to use. The item is usually tied to some cardboard, which gets in the way of having the tool in the right position.

# Motor Vehicle Crashes & Falls – Resources to Prevent Both!

By Ashley Hillman, Safe Communities

Did you know that research conducted by the American Automobile Association (AAA) tells us that older adults who have fallen are 40% more likely to experience a motor vehicle crash than older adults who have not fallen? For those of us fortunate enough to age, this means that our bodies will change in certain ways that may require us to be more intentional about improving balance, reducing fall hazards, and adapting our driving habits to continue driving as safely as possible. For example, our eyes process light differently as we age, which sometimes makes driving in the dark more challenging. And sometimes it takes a little longer to process information very quickly, such as when you should turn left at a flashing yellow arrow into oncoming traffic. And sometimes it just gets a bit more difficult to turn our heads quickly to check that blind spot when merging. The good news is that there are programs available in our community to help us stay safe (and keep others safe) on the road as we age.

*Keeping the Keys* is an older adult driver safety presentation that was developed by the AAA and provides helpful data about how natural aging may affect driving. It also provides recommendations on adjustments we can make to our driving habits as we age. If you are interested in this presentation (which can be given virtually), please contact Ashley Hillman at Safe

Communities ([ahillman@safercommunity.net](mailto:ahillman@safercommunity.net)). Other safe driving AAA resources can be found at <https://exchange.aaa.com/safety/senior-driver-safety-mobility/>.

The AARP also has a helpful program called CarFit (<https://car-fit.org/>). CarFit is a program that helps ensure that YOU fit properly inside your vehicle. A CarFit expert will help you make adjustments to your seat, steering wheel, and to the settings in your vehicle, ensuring that you are not only comfortable, but safe. AARP also has a Smart Driver course ([www.aarpdriversafety.org](http://www.aarpdriversafety.org)) that may even help you save on insurance after course completion.

As we age, it's important to improve our strength and flexibility to increase our falls resiliency AND to stay safer while driving on the road. Thankfully, there are many resources in our community for both balance & strength and for safe driving. Research has shown that many of us will outlive our ability to safely drive on the road, so it's important to make adjustments along our aging journey to keep us (and others!) safe and to plan ahead so that we can continue to live the lives that we want to live.

If you are interested in any of the resources mentioned, please contact Ashley Hillman at Safe Communities ([ahillman@safercommunity.net](mailto:ahillman@safercommunity.net) or 608-235-1957).



Safe **Communities**

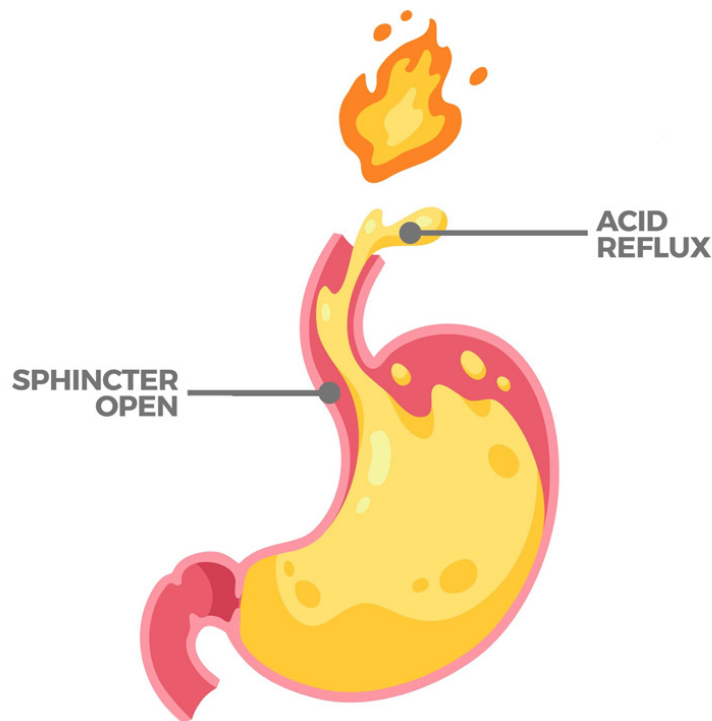
# Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

By Jeanna Olson, Triad Volunteer

Millions of Americans experience bloating, heartburn and constipation, all of which affect the digestive tract. The most common upper GI disorder among seniors is Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD). Reflux is considered GERD or chronic acid reflux, if it occurs at least twice a week for several weeks. Reflux is when stomach acid flows back into your esophagus, the tube that carries food and liquid from your throat to your stomach.

A weak lower esophageal sphincter (LES) is a major cause of GERD. The LES is a ring of muscle that forms a valve where it joins the stomach. It stays closed except when you swallow, when food passes from the esophagus to the stomach. The LES prevents reflux when it's closed, but stomach acid backs up into the esophagus if it doesn't close tightly enough.

## GERD STOMACH



GERD may present itself in the form of classic heartburn, trouble swallowing, non-cardiac chest pain, regurgitation, nausea or trouble breathing.

Older GERD sufferers may also experience breathing issues because asthma and acid reflux often occur together. Acid reflux can worsen asthma and asthma can worsen acid reflux, especially GERD. And in some cases asthma medications can make it worse.

Symptoms such as heartburn and regurgitation before the onset of asthma may point to GERD. Asthma worsening after eating, drinking alcohol or lying down, nocturnal coughing, not being able to control asthma with your usual medications, or first getting asthma as an adult are all indications you might have GERD.



## Asthma May Be Related to GERD When



Asthma symptoms follow a large meal



Asthma symptoms are worse during sleep



You are regularly hoarse



You cough frequently



Asthma does not respond to asthma medications



Your asthma is not well controlled

Your doctor can more easily make a diagnosis if you keep track of your symptoms and know what to look for. Factors that increase the risk of developing GERD include

- Weight Gain or Obesity
- Smoking or Second Hand Smoke
- Eating Large Meals
- Eating Late At Night and Lying Down Within 3 Hours of Eating
- Eating Fatty Foods
- Wearing Tight Fitting Clothes Over Your Abdomen
- Drinking Alcohol, Coffee or Carbonated Beverages
- Taking Certain Medications Such as Aspirin, Some Antidepressants, Sedatives, High Blood Pressure and Asthma Medications
- Hiatal Hernia
- Delayed Stomach Emptying
- A Family History of Acid Reflux

## GERD Risk Factors



Obesity



Excessive alcohol intake



Irregular meals



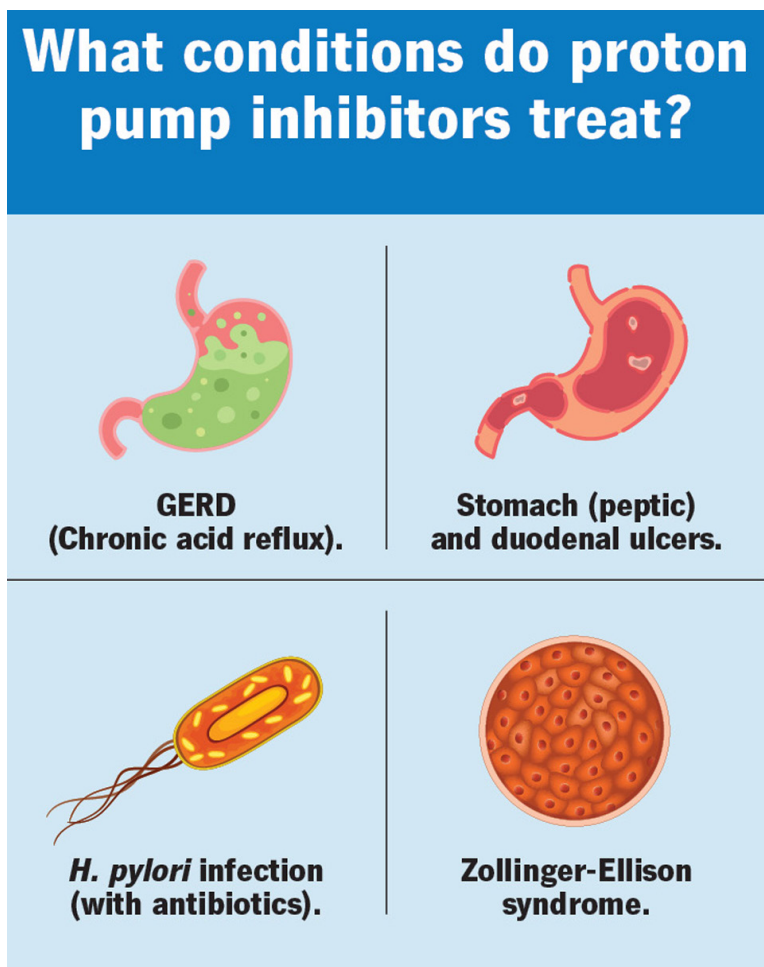
Immediately lying down after having a meal



Eating fatty food



There's a good chance you'll start taking a proton pump inhibitor such as Nexium, Prevacid or Prilosec OTC which give damaged esophageal tissue time to heal if diagnosed with acid reflux. It's important to consult with your doctor before taking them on your own because these medications can sometimes cause diarrhea, headaches or nausea and less often, low vitamin B-12 or magnesium levels.



Changes in eating habits can go a long way to help with acid reflux. Eating smaller meals more slowly and more often throughout the day, aka "grazing," and knowing your food triggers are good places to start. I've found keeping a food journal and getting a little exercise after eating to be especially helpful.

There are many fatty, spicy or acidic foods that can trigger reflux, and while some choices such as hot and spicy, fried, fast or fatty foods make sense, other triggers such as peppermint or sparkling water may surprise you.

Managing diet along with reducing risk factors will not only make you feel better, but help prevent GERD complications such as esophagitis, narrowing of the esophagus, or precancerous changes (Barrett's esophagus).



There are a lot of available resources about GERD.

The Johns Hopkins GERD Diet page <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/gerd-diet-foods-that-help-with-acid-reflux-heartburn> talks about alkaline and watery foods and is helpful and easy to read.

You can download a free brochure from the International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders, IFFGD <https://iffgd.org/resources/publication-library/gerd-questions-and-answers/>

and check out their About GERD page <https://aboutgerd.org/about-us/> for a more comprehensive look at Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease.

# Norovirus: My Reflections

By Rick Larson, Triad Volunteer

How many of you have heard of norovirus? Most seniors have. It's a virus that causes havoc in nursing homes, hospitals, schools and even on cruise ships. Its symptoms are gross: copious vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, lasting for three or four days and is very contagious.

As fate would have it, while researching the subject for this RSVP article, I became a victim of the virus and now can speak first hand about this insidious, lugubrious illness.

My brush with the virus began in the middle of the night with abdominal cramps followed by a quick gallup to the toilet. It was soon followed by four more trips to sit on the throne and empty vast amounts of mostly liquid from my bowel. Fortunately, I wasn't cursed with the nausea and vomiting portion of this affliction.

In the early morning darkness when I stumbled back to bed, I told my wife what was happening. She - a bacteriologist at a local hospital - diagnosed it immediately. "Norovirus," she said.

In the morning, feeling a seriously ragged, I ventured online to find out more about my new companion-illness. The internet has several sources of good, free information about it. I chose the [Mayo Clinic site](#).

According to Mayo ...

Noroviruses are highly, highly contagious. They can spread via contaminated food or water or surfaces or contact with the vomit or stool of an infected person. It's not spread through breathing or coughing.

Signs and symptoms of norovirus can include: nausea, vomiting, stomach pain or cramps, watery or loose diarrhea, low-grade fever and muscle pain

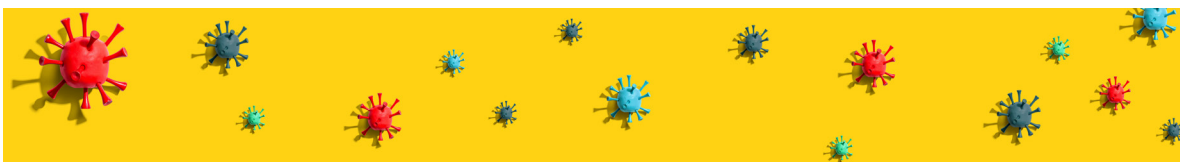
Symptoms usually begin 12 to 48 hours after a first exposure to a norovirus and last 1 to 3 days although in some cases can last longer. Fortunately, the disease is self-limiting. That means your body will most likely fight off the infection. But if you feel you're not recovering after a few days, consult your doctor.

Sufferers of norovirus should take it easy and stay home. Most important, be sure to stay hydrated. Drink lots of water but avoid alcohol and caffeine. If you're hungry, eat foods that are easy to digest such as broth and jello.

Since norovirus is so highly contagious, avoid close contact with others while in the throes of the infection and do lots of hand washing with soap and water. (Alcohol based hand sanitizers do not work well against norovirus.) In addition, disinfect the toilet and contaminated surfaces with a mixture of bleach and water wherever possible.

What about my illness? It lasted four days. I was lethargic most of that time and lacked any appetite. Gradually, my abdominal ache ceased along with the messier symptoms. Soon, I started exercising again and my appetite returned.

Now I'm waiting for the next virus to find me so I can do another article from a personal perspective.



# Data Privacy Tips

By Tiffany Bernhardt Schultz, Better Business Bureau

The possibility of a cyberattack has gone from being science fiction to a common threat. Personal information that is stored or shared on the internet and can be accessed by cell phones, tablets, laptops, and/or any other device that connects to Wi-Fi or an internet provider. This makes it easy for you to access your information. It also makes it easy for con artists to scam you to get your information.

Although it may seem like there is nothing you can do to stop cyberattacks, there are some best practices that you can do to help guard against losing your personal information to cyber thieves.

**Share with care.** Posts on social media could last for a lifetime. Consider who will see the post, how readers perceive it, and what information it might reveal about you.

**Manage privacy settings.** Check the privacy and security settings on web services and apps and set them to your comfort level. Each device, application, or browser will have different features to limit how and with whom you share information.

**Personal info is like money: value and protect it.** Personal information, such as your purchase history, IP address, and/or your location has tremendous value to businesses – just like money. Make informed decisions about whether or not to share data with certain businesses by considering the amount of personal information they are asking for and weighing it against the benefits you may receive in return.

**Make your passwords long and strong.** Use long passwords with a combination

of upper-and lower-case letters, numbers and symbols – eight characters for most accounts and twelve characters for email and financial accounts. Don't use the same password for multiple accounts, especially email and financial. Consider using a password manager to store passwords.

**Keep tabs on apps.** Many apps ask for access to personal information, such as geographic location, and your contacts list and photo album, before using their services. Be thoughtful about who gets that information and be wary of apps that require access to information that is not required or relevant to the services they offer. Delete unused apps on your internet-connected devices and keep others secure by performing updates.

**Lock down your login.** For your online accounts, use the strongest authentication tools available. Your usernames and passwords are not enough; consider two-factor authentication for key accounts like email, banking, and social media.

**Don't click on unfamiliar links.** Whether at home or at work, don't click on links from unfamiliar sources or unexpected correspondence. One false click can infect an entire computer.

**Pay attention to internet-connected devices.** Smart thermostats, voice control systems, cars and even refrigerators are just the beginning of the growing list of devices that watch our homes and track our locations. Read the privacy policy and understand what data is being collected and how it will be used.



<https://www.bbb.org/scamtracker>