

Finding Ulcers Caused by Bacteria

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What is a peptic ulcer?

A peptic ulcer is an open sore inside of your stomach or intestine. It starts when the acid in your stomach eats away at your stomach wall. Ulcers can be very painful. Sometimes an ulcer can bleed and get worse over time. It can also get bigger and deeper. If an ulcer keeps getting worse, it can break through the wall of your stomach. This can be very painful and cause the contents of your stomach to leak out into other parts of your body.

How do I know if I have an ulcer?

You may have an ulcer if you:

- Feel heavy or bloated
- Have a burning or dull pain in your stomach
- Feel sick or feel like throwing up
- Feel pain when you eat or drink or soon after you eat or drink
- Feel full very fast when eating a meal
- Have been losing weight without trying



If you have any of these things, you should go see your doctor.

What can cause ulcers?

Some medications can cause ulcers, especially some that people can buy at the store for fevers or pain. Some examples are ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve) and many others. You should always tell your doctor what medications you are taking, even if you got them somewhere else.

A common cause of ulcers is from bacteria called *H. pylori* (*H. pie-lor-eee*). These bacteria can live inside the wall of your stomach or intestine. Your stomach's acid can't kill it. *H. pylori* also makes chemicals that break down mucous, which protects your stomach from acid it uses to digest food. So when you have less mucous, your stomach acid makes ulcers worse.

How to find the cause of the ulcer?

You should always tell your doctor about medications that you are using, even if your doctor did not give them to you. Some medications can cause ulcers.

If your ulcer is caused by *H. pylori*, there are many tests that can be used to find it:

Endoscopy: A tube is put down your throat while you are asleep. With the tube, small samples of your stomach or intestine are taken to see if *H. pylori* are living in there. If you have an ulcer, samples can be taken from that too. These samples are then taken to the lab for more testing.

Breath test: A sample of your breath is taken to find a chemical that the bacteria make.

Stool test: A sample of your poop is taken. Then it is tested to see if your body is making antibodies (chemicals to fight off infection) to fight *H. pylori*.

Blood test: A sample of your blood is taken. Then it is tested to see if your body is making antibodies to fight *H. pylori*.

Why are there so many different tests, and which should I use?

All of these tests are good at finding if you have *H. pylori* in your stomach or intestine. Different tests are better for different reasons. Some are better at finding *H. pylori*. Others

are done because they are easier and cost less. Endoscopy is a good test, but it is not usually done in a clinic. It can also be more expensive. The breath test is also very good, but most clinics do not have it because the equipment used is large and expensive. The stool test and blood test are often used in clinic because they are cheaper, easier to use, and usually easier for patients. When used together, these tests are very good at finding H. pylori.



How do I get rid of the ulcer?

Your doctor can help find the right medications to make your ulcer better. After you and your doctor find out what is causing the ulcer, then you can decide what is best to treat it. See some of the websites below to learn more about ulcers and treatment for ulcers.

Additional Resources:

<http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/digestive/disorders/186.html>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/pepticulcer.html>

http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/pepticulcers_ez/

<http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hpylori/>

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