

Title: Helicobacter pylori and gastric ulcers

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Abstract: The bacteria Helicobacter pylori is the most common cause of gastric ulcers and can be effectively treated with antibiotics with little risk of recurrence.

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If you have a stomach ulcer did you know that a bacteria could be the cause of your ulcer?

It's true! A bacteria called Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori for short) is the most common cause of stomach ulcers.

I don't understand, I thought stress caused ulcers?

Doctors once thought that, but now they know better. In a healthy stomach a mucus layer protects your stomach walls from the acid used to digest food. But when you have an H. pylori infection that protective layer is disrupted. This causes your own stomach acid to attack your stomach wall, which can cause an ulcer! This is how bacteria can cause an ulcer.

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How do I know if I have a stomach ulcer?

Stomach ulcers can cause many symptoms such as:

- **burning stomach pain several hours after a meal that is relieved by food**
- **Waking up at night with stomach pain**
- **Vomiting blood or dark tarry stool**
- **Heartburn**
- **Weight loss**
- **Belching or bloating**

If you have some of these symptoms your doctor may want to test you for H. pylori infection.

What sort of tests will my doctor use?

There are several tests for H. pylori. Several common tests are:

- **a blood test for antibodies to the bacteria**
- **a breath test for chemicals the bacteria makes**
- **a stool test for the bacteria**
- **Your doctor may also have a specialist put a camera into your stomach to look for ulcers**

If I do have an H. pylori infection what do I do next?

Your doctor will treat you with antibiotics and medicines to protect your stomach wall. There are several different treatments and your doctor will help you determine which one is right for you.

If I get it treated will the infection come back?

It is very rare for H. pylori infections to return after treatment. Over 95% of people in America never have another problem after treatment.

What are some other causes of stomach ulcers?

Some other causes of ulcers are pain medicines, serious illness, and certain kinds of tumors. Your doctor will help decide what is the cause of your ulcer.

That's great! Where can I learn more?

You can go to the National Institute of Health website for more information.

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