

Who should be treated?

Doctors recommend that all people with ulcers **who also have** *H. pylori* infection should be treated.

Many people who have *H. pylori* do not experience any symptoms. If you feel well, there is no urgency to have treatment for *H. pylori*. The final decision is for you to make, after talking it over with your doctor.

Is diet important for treating *H. pylori* infection or ulcers?

Diet does not seem to have a major effect on either *H. pylori* or the healing of ulcers. However, smoking, drinking too much alcohol, and medications containing aspirin and some other anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen, can make the symptoms worse.

Where can I find out more?

Contact your doctor if you are worried about ulcers, or call **Health Direct** on 1800 022 222.

Some useful web-sites are:

- digestive.niddk.nih.gov
- www.gut.nsw.edu.au
- www.helico.com

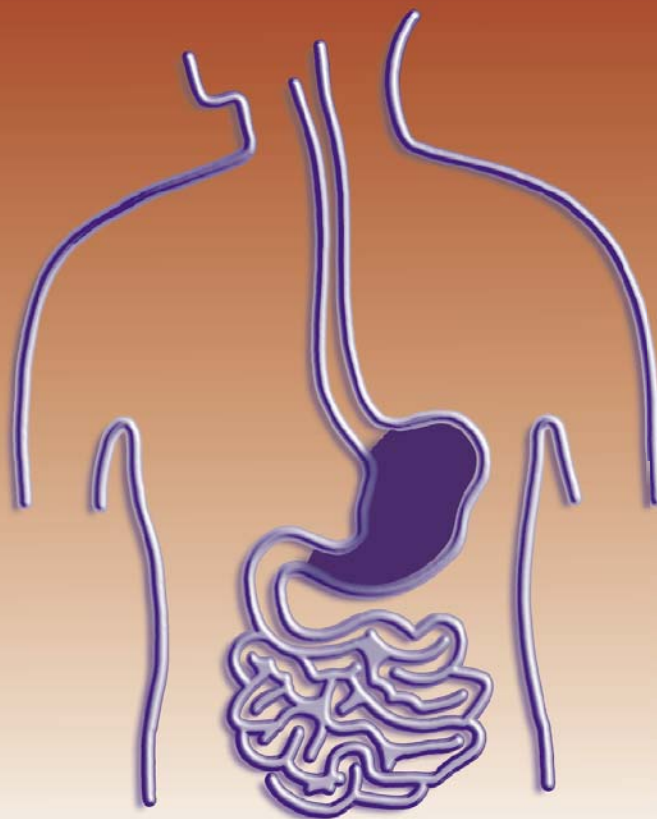


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Ulcers & *Helicobacter pylori*



What is *Helicobacter pylori*?

Helicobacter pylori is a type of bacterium (germ) which causes inflammation of the stomach lining (gastritis) and ulcers.

H. pylori is the main cause of ulcers in humans, although it does not always cause ulcers.

Ulcers are breaks in the lining of the stomach (gastric ulcer) or upper small intestine (duodenal ulcer). *H. pylori* can cause both duodenal and gastric ulcers. *H. pylori* is also associated with some stomach cancers.

Are all ulcers caused by *H. pylori*?

Most duodenal ulcers are caused by *H. pylori*. However, about a third of gastric ulcers are caused by something else, such as aspirin or similar anti-inflammatory drugs, while alcohol and smoking can make them worse.

What are the symptoms?

Most people infected with *H. pylori* do not have any symptoms at all. Others have nausea, gas, bloating and stomach pain. Sometimes ulcers can bleed and eventually cause anaemia, making you pale and tired.

See your doctor immediately if:

- Your stools (faeces) are ever bloody, black or tar-like (take a sample with you)
- Your vomit contains blood or material that looks like coffee grounds
- You are unusually pale or weak
- You have persistent and severe stomach pains.

Who is at risk?

H. pylori infection occurs throughout the world, in every part of society. In developed countries, about a third of adults are infected with *H. pylori*, but the infection is rare in children. Once a person is infected with *H. pylori*, they will carry the bacteria for many years, even for life, unless treated with certain antibiotics.

How is *H. pylori* spread?

The exact way in which *H. pylori* is spread is not clear. It is probably spread by person-to-person contact or by swallowing contaminated food or water.

Careful hand washing and the use of separate personal items, such as cutlery, chopsticks, drink bottles, glasses and cups, are probably the best ways of reducing person-to-person spread of *H. pylori*.

How is the infection diagnosed and monitored?

The main tests for *H. pylori* are:

- Examination of the stomach using a flexible tube called an endoscope. A tiny amount (biopsy) of the stomach lining is removed and tested for *H. pylori*. This is generally safe and painless.
- Breath test – a specially prepared capsule is swallowed and then a breath sample is taken. This test is often used to see if treatment has been effective.
- Stool tests can also be used to see if treatment has been effective.
- Blood tests can be used to find out if someone has ever had the infection, but cannot tell if the person currently has the infection. They cannot be used to see if treatment has worked.

How is the infection treated?

Most *H. pylori* infections are cured with a combination of anti-ulcer medication and antibiotics. You have to take all the medications for up to 2 weeks. About a third of people suffer mild side-effects including nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and thrush (a yeast infection).

Because the treatment programs are not always successful, you should have a follow-up test (usually breath or stool) to check that the infection has gone. If you still have *H. pylori*, you may be given different treatment.

You must tell your doctor if you are pregnant, or could become pregnant, during treatment.