

Helicobacter Pylori

Helicobacter pylori is a bacterium that lives in the lining of the stomach. In most cases, this germ does not seem to cause problems. However, in some people, helicobacter pylori can cause inflammation (gastritis) in the lining of the stomach or in the upper part of the small intestine (duodenum). Under these conditions, some people seem to additionally develop ulcers-if *other factors are also present*. The factors that appear to be necessary for ulcers to develop include:

- the use of certain medications, such as aspirin or other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- excessive alcohol use
- smoking
- stress
- other illnesses

No one is certain how people get helicobacter pylori. The infection may be spread through contact with fecal matter, which may occur if people do not wash their hands after going to the bathroom. Family members of people with the bacteria are more likely to have it than others. This could mean that it has spread from person to person, or that it has been obtained through the same food sources.

If you have abdominal symptoms, such as pain or hunger that awakens you from sleep, you might suggest that your medical professional evaluate you for an ulcer. If an ulcer is found, additional testing for helicobacter pylori may be recommended.

Treatment usually includes a combination of antibiotics and medication to reduce the effects of the acid in your stomach. It is very important that people who are being treated for a helicobacter pylori infection take all of the medications prescribed. A treatment plan that contains at least three medications is typically needed to cure helicobacter pylori. Such combination treatments are the most effective way to help ensure that the bacteria do not develop resistance to the antibiotics used to treat them. Initial treatment is effective about 90 percent of the time. Once it has been treated, helicobacter pylori is not likely to return. If the treatment does not work, or symptoms persist after treatment, it's important to let your medical professional know so further evaluation and treatment can be prescribed.

In many cases, if you treat ulcers without treating helicobacter pylori, the ulcers are likely to return. When the infection is eliminated with antibiotics and proper treatment, the underlying cause of the ulcer is also eliminated and ulcers are unlikely to return.

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For more health information ...

- Connect to our Web site at *members.kp.org*
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult your doctor.