

Care Gram

Peptic Ulcer Disease

What Is Peptic Ulcer Disease?

A thick protective mucous layer covers the lining of the stomach. This layer prevents stomach acid from injuring the wall of the stomach. A peptic ulcer is an open sore in the lining of the stomach or the small intestine (duodenum). The stomach makes a very strong acid, which helps digest and break down food before it enters the duodenum. More than 80 percent of ulcers occur in the duodenum.

What Causes Peptic Ulcers?

- Too much acid in the stomach
- Stomach infection caused by the bacteria *Helicobacter pylori* (H. pylori)
- Aspirin and arthritis drugs (NSAIDS)
- Too little of the substances that protect the digestive tract lining
- Smoking
- Type O blood
- Family history (parents or close relatives)

What Are the Symptoms?

Although some patients may have no symptoms, other people can have symptoms that include:

- Burning pain in the upper stomach area several hours after a meal, or in the middle of the night
- Bloating or feeling full after small amounts of food
- Not feeling hungry
- Nausea or vomiting

Severe symptoms may include:

- Bowel movements that are bloody, black, or smelly
- Vomiting blood
- Development of a hole in the wall of the stomach
- Blockage of the intestine
- Weight loss



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How Are Peptic Ulcers Diagnosed?

To diagnose peptic ulcers, your doctor will need to do the following:

- Complete a full medical history
- Perform an upper intestinal endoscopy, where a thin, lighted flexible tube with a camera called an endoscope is used to look directly at the esophagus (your swallowing tube) and the stomach
- Perform a barium X-ray of the stomach

How Is Peptic Ulcer Disease Treated?

- Take medicine to reduce or eliminate stomach acid.
- Stop aspirin and arthritis drugs if found to be the cause.
- Treat the bacterial infection *H. pylori* using antibiotics. After treatment, test again to make sure the infection is gone.
- Reduce caffeine and alcohol, which causes stimulation of stomach acid and may interfere with healing of the ulcer.
- Take antacids for relief of symptoms (antacids do not help heal ulcers).
- Undergo surgery for uncontrolled bleeding or other severe problems.
- Stop smoking as nicotine delays the healing of an ulcer.
- Eating smaller, more frequent meals can alleviate discomfort.
- Avoid any foods that cause pain or discomfort.
- Reduce stress if it worsens your symptoms.
- Undergo surgery for uncontrolled bleeding or other severe problems.

Please seek medical care right away if you have any of the following symptoms:

- New onset abdominal pain
- Fainting
- Excessive sweating
- Vomiting blood
- Blood in stool (including dark stool)

If you have any of the symptoms listed in this care gram, please see your doctor. Peptic ulcers can return, and symptoms should be treated quickly.