

Care Gram

Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori)

What Is Helicobacter Pylori?

Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) is a type of bacteria that infects a person's stomach. Although most people with H. pylori infection will not experience symptoms, some may encounter adverse health conditions.

What Are the Symptoms of H. Pylori?

- Pain or discomfort in the upper abdomen
- Feeling full after eating small amounts of food
- Loss of appetite or not feeling hungry
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dark or black-colored bowel movements
- Feeling more tired than usual

Does H. Pylori Always Cause Ulcers?

H. pylori infection does not always cause ulcers. However, it does produce redness and swelling of the stomach lining most of the time.

How Common Is the Infection?

About 30 percent of people in the United States have the infection. Infection is more likely in older people (50 percent will have it by age 60) and is rare in children. Once infected with H. pylori, a person usually continues to carry the germ unless certain medicines are used to cure the infection.

How Did I Get It and Can I Spread It?

H. pylori infection appears to be passed from person to person. You are more likely to have H. pylori if:

- Your spouse is infected
- You live in a place that is crowded or unclean
- Have multiple children, especially if they share beds

Animals or pets usually do not spread H. pylori, and good hygiene reduces the spread.



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How Is the Infection Diagnosed?

Blood tests can determine if you have ever had the infection, but do not show if the infection is active. A stool specimen and breath test also can be used to identify the presence of H. pylori. A stool sample is often collected at home. Two weeks before the test, you should avoid certain medications such as antibiotics, antacids, bismuth and PPIs/H2 blockers.

An exam of the stomach can be done using a small-lighted medical device called an endoscope. During the exam, a sample of the stomach lining can be obtained to test for H. pylori.

How Is the Infection Treated?

About 90 percent of H. pylori infections can be cured using both anti-ulcer medicine and antibiotics. Many treatment programs are available. Your doctor will select the best one for you if treatment is needed.

- Follow your doctor's directions so that you will have the best chance of curing the infection.
- Complete follow-up testing, if needed, to ensure that the infection is no longer present.
 - The test should be performed 30 days after the treatment is finished and proton pump medication has stopped for 1 to 2 weeks before testing.
 - The best treatment programs are not always 100 percent successful.
 - If the test is negative, you have been cured and will not likely be infected again during your lifetime.
 - If the test is positive, you may need a different or longer treatment program.
- There is no proof that diet has any effect on either H. pylori or healing of ulcers.
- Avoid alcohol, smoking, aspirin and some arthritis drugs, such as ibuprofen, since these are factors associated with ulcer formation independent of H. pylori.