

Helicobacter Pylori

What is Helicobacter Pylori?

Helicobacter pylori, often just called H. pylori, is a bacterium that is frequently found in the stomach. It is estimated that half of the world's population has H. pylori living in their stomach, but most people will never develop any signs or symptoms of an infection. It is thought that most people who have H. pylori are exposed to it by eating or drinking food or water that is contaminated by fecal matter.

In some instances, H. pylori can infect the protective lining of the upper gastrointestinal (GI) tract and cause inflammation of the stomach and upper small intestine. This can cause a number of different GI problems including gastritis, peptic ulcer disease, and rarely, stomach cancer. Why some people develop problems from H. pylori and others don't is still unknown.

What are the Symptoms of Helicobacter Pylori Infection?

In general, most people infected with H. pylori have no signs or symptoms of an infection. If you do develop a problem because of H. pylori, some symptoms that you may have include:

- nausea
- vomiting
- pain in the upper abdomen
- heartburn
- feeling full after eating only a small amount of food
- bloating or belching

How is Helicobacter Pylori Diagnosed?

If your doctor suspects that you have an H. pylori infection, you will be tested for the bacteria using one of several different tests. One method is by using a breath test. This test requires you to drink a liquid that contains a special material that H. pylori can split into new products. A few minutes after drinking the solution, you will be asked to breath into a balloon-like bag, which allows your breath to be tested for these new products. Other tests that can be used to detect H. pylori are blood or stool exams.

Some people with H. pylori infections will have symptoms that need to be evaluated with an upper endoscopy. This involves inserting a long, narrow tube with a light and tiny camera attached to it (endoscope), through your mouth and esophagus into your stomach and upper part of your small intestine. This allows your doctor to inspect the lining of the upper GI tract and take a biopsy of any abnormal areas. The tissue that is taken during the biopsy can be sent to a lab and tested for H. pylori.



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How is a Helicobacter Pylori Infection Treated?

Since H. pylori is a bacterial infection, it is treated with antibiotics. However, this particular bacteria can be challenging to treat and is often resistant to antibiotics, so you will likely be given a prescription for two different antibiotics, along with an acid reducing medication. Typically this regimen is given for 10 to 14 days. Even when all of the medications are taken correctly, up to 20% of patients with H. pylori will not be cured by their first course of treatment. Because of this, you will be retested for H. pylori after completing your treatment. If you still have it, you will receive a second cycle of medication. It is important to complete all medications as prescribed and to follow up with your doctor.

What is the Prognosis of a Helicobacter Pylori Infection?

Most people recover from an H. pylori infection and have no more problems. However, there is a very small risk that H. pylori can cause gastric cancer. If your doctor is concerned about this possibility, you will likely be followed closely with additional tests.

Where Can You Get More Information About Helicobacter Pylori?

- **National Library of Medicine**
<https://medlineplus.gov/helicobacterpyloriinfections.html>
- **Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**
<https://www.cdc.gov/ulcer/files/hpfacts.pdf>
- **Kids Health**
<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/h-pylori.html>

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