

AGA Patient Education Section

Peptic Ulcer Disease

What is Peptic Ulcer Disease?

Peptic ulcer disease is when painful sores form in the lining of the stomach, duodenum (start of the small intestine), or bowels. **Ulcers** can cause belly pain, and sometimes bleeding or a hole in the stomach or bowel.

Symptoms

The most common symptom of an ulcer is burning pain in your stomach between your breastbone and your belly button. This pain is often felt when your stomach is empty, but can happen any time, lasting anywhere from a few minutes to many hours.

Other, less common, symptoms could be upset stomach, throwing up, blood in the stool or vomit, loss of appetite, or weight loss.

Causes

Many ulcers are caused by infection from *Helicobacter pylori* bacteria. Another common cause of peptic ulcer disease is the routine use of pain medications called **nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)**, such as aspirin or ibuprofen.

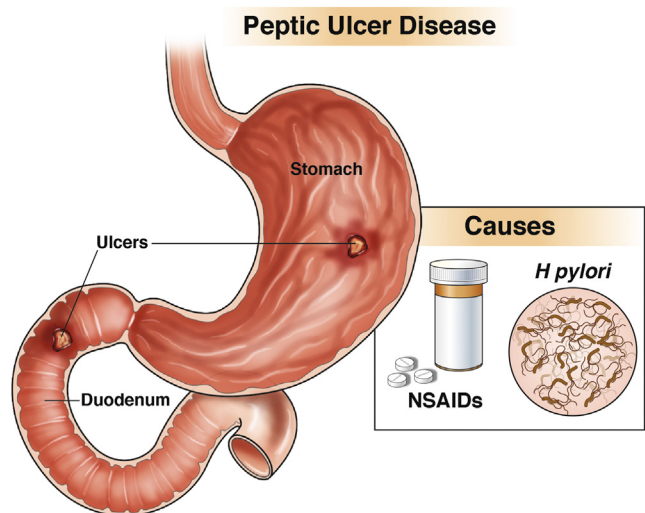
Testing

There are a few tests your doctor can do to see if you have peptic ulcer disease.

- To find out if you have *H pylori*, your doctor may send your breath, blood, or stool sample to a laboratory to be tested for the bacteria.
- The best test to find ulcers and treat complications is an endoscopy.
- An upper-gastrointestinal series, during which you will be given a liquid to drink called barium that makes it easier to see ulcers on the x-ray, might also be done.

Treatment

Your doctor will work with you to find the best treatment plan based on what is causing your ulcers.



If you have *H pylori* infection:

- You will be prescribed:
 - One or two bacteria-killing antibiotics.
 - A medicine that has bismuth.
 - A medicine to lessen the acid in your stomach.
- The medications are taken for 1–2 weeks and can usually cure ulcers.
- If the ulcer fails to heal (rarely), you may need surgery.

If you have ulcers not caused by *H pylori*, stop using NSAIDs, and your doctor will start you on medicine to lessen the acid in your stomach.

For more information on peptic ulcer disease, talk to your gastroenterologist and visit patient.gastro.org. For more information on the misuse of over-the-counter pain medicine, visit GutCheckFacts.org.