**Peptic ulcer**

Stomach ulcers are painful sores that can be found in the stomach lining or small intestine. They occur when the thick layer of mucus that protects the stomach from digestive juices is reduced, thus enabling the digestive acids to eat away at the lining tissues of the stomach.

**Peptic ulcers include:**

* **Gastric ulcers** that occur on the inside of the stomach
* **Esophageal ulcers** that occur inside the (esophagus)
* **Duodenal ulcers** that occur on the inside of the upper portion of your small intestine (duodenum)
* **Causes:**
* an infection with the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*(*H. pylori*)
* long-term use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin and ibuprofen
* excess acid (hyperacidity) in the stomach, which may be related to genetics, lifestyle (stress, smoking), and certain foods
* Zollinger-Ellison syndrome, a rare disease that makes the body produce excess stomach acid

**Certain factors and behaviors can put the patient at higher risk for developing stomach ulcers**

* frequent use of steroids (such as those for treating asthma)
* hypercalcemia (overproduction of calcium)
* family history of stomach ulcers
* being over 50 years old
* excessive consumption of alcohol
* smoking

**Difference between Gastric and Duodenal Ulcer symptoms**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Gastric Ulcer** | **Duodenal Ulcer** |
| epigastric pain occurring 30 minutes to 1 hour after meals | epigastric pain occurring 2-3 hours after meals |
| Aggravated by eating (because acid secretion increase at meal time) leads to weight loss | Relieved by food causes weight gain |
| Relieved by vomiting | Not relived |
| No pain at hours of sleep | Pain at hours of sleep |
| More common in persons older than age 50 | More common between ages 25 and 50 |

**Genaral symptoms of Stomach Ulcers**

pain in the stomach, the pain will be more intense when the stomach is empty and it can last for a few minutes or several hours.

* weight loss
* not wanting to eat because of pain
* nausea or vomiting
* bloating
* heartburn (burning sensation in the chest)
* pain improves when the patient eat, drink, or take antacids

**When to seek medical advice**

* [vomiting blood](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vomiting-blood/Pages/Introduction.aspx) – the blood can appear bright red or have a dark brown, similar to coffee grounds
* passing dark, sticky, tar-like stools
* a sudden, sharp pain

**The main complications include:**

* bleeding at the site of the ulcer
* the stomach lining at the site of the ulcer splitting open – known as perforation
* the ulcer blocking the movement of food through the digestive system – known as gastric obstruction

**How Are Stomach Ulcers Diagnosed?**

Diagnosis and treatment will depend on symptoms and the severity of ulcer.

To rule out *H. pylori* infection, a blood, stool, or breath test may be ordered.

* **barium X-ray**: a thick white liquid (barium) that you drink helps the stomach and small intestine show up on X-rays
* **endoscopy**: a thin, lighted tube is inserted through the mouth and into the stomach to look for the presence of an ulcer
* **endoscopic biopsy**: a piece of stomach tissue is removed so it can be analyzed

How stomach ulcers are treated

With treatment, most stomach ulcers will heal within a month or two. The treatment recommended for you will depend on what caused the ulcer.

Most people will be prescribed a medication called a proton pump inhibitor (PPI) to reduce the amount of acid their stomach produces, and allow the ulcer to heal naturally.

If an H. pylori infection is responsible for the ulcers, [antibiotics](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Antibiotics-penicillins/Pages/Introduction.aspx) will also be used to kill the bacteria, which should prevent the ulcer coming back.

If the ulcers are caused by the use of NSAIDs, PPIs are usually prescribed and your doctor will discuss whether you should keep using NSAIDs. Alternative medication to NSAIDs, such as [paracetamol](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/painkillers-paracetamol/pages/introduction.aspx), may be recommended.