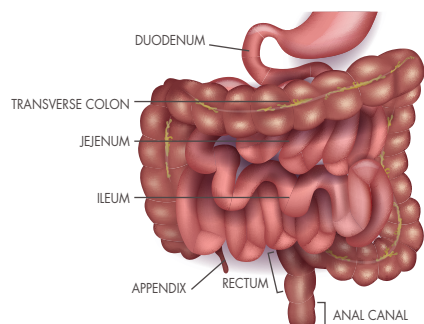


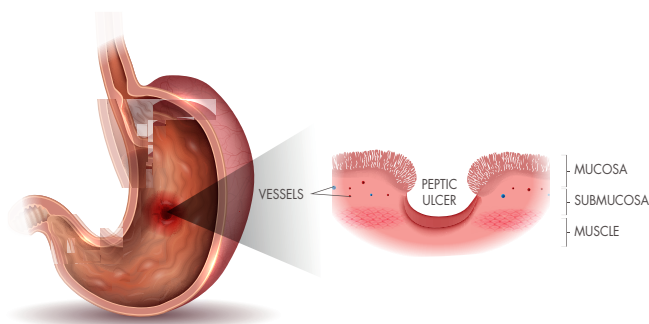
HEARTBURN & ULCERS

What is peptic ulcer disease?

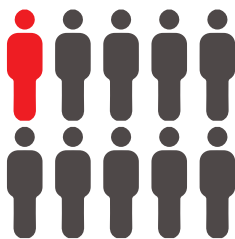
Stomach ulcers and ulcers of the first part of the small intestine, called the duodenum, are sometimes called peptic ulcers.^{1,2}



Peptic ulcers are open sores that develop in the lining of the stomach or the duodenum.^{1,3}



What causes peptic ulcers?



- ▶ Research shows that around **1 in 10 people** may have a **peptic ulcer** at some point in their life. Peptic ulcers can affect people of any age, including children, but mostly occur in people aged 60 or older. Men tend to be more commonly affected than women.¹
- ▶ Ulcers develop when the **normal defence and repair** mechanisms of the lining of the stomach or duodenum are **weakened**.^{1,3}

Certain lifestyle factors may increase the likelihood of peptic ulcers, or make the symptoms worse:^{1,2,3}



Smoking



Excessive alcohol use



Emotional stress

The most common causes of peptic ulcers are:^{1,3,4,5,6}

<i>Helicobacter pylori</i> (<i>H. pylori</i>) infection of the stomach	Use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ <i>H. pylori</i> infections are common, with as many as half the world's population being infected.▶ As the infection does not usually cause symptoms, it is possible to be infected without realising it.▶ In some people, the bacteria can irritate the stomach lining and make it more vulnerable to damage from the stomach acid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ NSAIDs are medicines widely used to treat pain, a high temperature (fever) and inflammation (swelling) and include medications such as aspirin and ibuprofen.▶ NSAIDs increase the risk of peptic ulcers particularly if they're taken for a long time or at high doses

Both *H. pylori* and NSAIDs can break down the stomach's defence against the acid it produces to digest food, allowing the stomach lining to become damaged and an ulcer to form.^{1,3}

What are the symptoms of peptic ulcer?

The most common symptom of peptic ulcer is a mild to moderate pain just below your breastbone. This is often described as gnawing, burning, aching, or soreness or sometimes as a sensation of hunger.^{1,2,3}

Less common symptoms of a stomach ulcer can include:^{1,2}

- ▶ indigestion
- ▶ heartburn
- ▶ loss of appetite
- ▶ feeling and being sick
- ▶ weight loss



How is peptic ulcer diagnosed?

If your doctor suspects you have an ulcer, you may be referred for a gastroscopy which is usually done as an outpatient procedure. You may be given a mild sedative injection and have your throat sprayed with a local anaesthetic before a thin, flexible tube (an endoscope) with a camera at one end is passed into your mouth and down into your stomach and first section of the small intestine (duodenum). The images taken by the camera will usually confirm or rule out an ulcer. A small tissue sample may also be taken from your stomach or duodenum, so it can be tested for the *H. pylori* bacteria.^{1,3}

If your doctor suspects that your ulcer is caused by *H. pylori* infection, they may recommend one of the following tests:^{1,2}



- ▶ **urea breath test** – you will be given a special drink containing a chemical that is broken down by *H. pylori*; your breath is then analysed to see whether or not you have an *H. pylori* infection



- ▶ **stool antigen test** – a small stool sample is tested for the bacteria



- ▶ **blood test** – a sample of your blood is tested for antibodies to the *H. pylori* bacteria (antibodies are proteins produced naturally in your blood and help to fight infection); this has now largely been replaced by the stool antigen test

How is peptic ulcer treated?

Your treatment will depend on what caused your peptic ulcer, but it will include a class of medicine that inhibits gastric acid secretion.^{1,2} With treatment, most ulcers heal in a month or two.¹

Commonly used acid reducing medications are:

Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ The most potent of the medicines that reduce acid production³▶ They reduce the amount of acid your stomach produces, preventing further damage to the ulcer as it heals naturally¹▶ Use of a PPI may help to reduce the risk of peptic ulcer complications⁷
Histamine-2 (H₂) blockers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ They relieve symptoms and promote ulcer healing by reducing the production of stomach acid³

If you test positive for *H. pylori*, you will need treatment to clear the infection, which can heal the ulcer and prevent it from returning.¹

Your doctor may also recommend taking additional antacid medication to neutralise your stomach acid and provide immediate, short-term, symptom relief. Some antacids also contain a medicine called an alginate, which produces a protective coating on the lining of your stomach.^{1,3}

If your stomach ulcer is caused by *H. pylori* infection, you may be prescribed a course of antibiotics and a proton pump inhibitor (PPI).¹ If the infection is treated successfully, peptic ulcer disease comes back in less than 10 % of people.³

If your stomach ulcer is just caused by taking NSAIDs, a course of PPI medication is recommended. Your doctor may recommend an alternative painkiller to NSAIDs.¹

There aren't any special lifestyle measures you need to take during treatment, but avoiding stress, alcohol, spicy foods and smoking may reduce your symptoms while your ulcer heals.^{1,3}

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