



# CORNERSTONE MEDICAL CLINIC

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## Questions & Answers about Helicobacter pylori Ulcers

### ***What causes ulcers?***

Over the years there have been many answers to this question: stress, stomach acid, spicy foods, etc. Ulcers were treated as one of those problems you just had to live with. There was no cure. Ten years ago, doctors noticed that many people with ulcers had a particular kind of bacteria in the lining of their stomachs. These bacteria are called *Helicobacter pylori*, ("*H*" *pylori* or "H.P." for short.)

### ***Does H. pylori cause ulcers?***

No one knows exactly what these bacteria do to the lining of the stomach, but when the bacteria are killed, the ulcer usually heals permanently. It may be that *H. pylori* somehow weakens the lining of the stomach so that it can be harmed more easily by acid.

### ***Does everyone with H. pylori get ulcers?***

No. In fact, studies have shown that, while 60% of Americans will have *H. pylori* by the end of their lives, only one in six of these people ever develop an active ulcer. Most others will have no symptoms. No one knows why some people develop ulcers and other don't.

### ***How do I find out whether I have H. pylori?***

If you haven't had an ulcer and don't have ulcer symptoms now, there is probably no need to take medicine for *H. pylori*. If you have or had an ulcer, your doctor may prescribe a combinations of two or more antibiotics to kill the bacteria. The ones most commonly used are: Biaxin (clarithromycin), Flagyl (metronidazole), tetracycline and Pepto-Bismol. A drug that reduces stomach acid is also commonly prescribed: Prevacid (lansoprazole), Prilosec (omeprazole) or one of the acid blockers.

### ***How long do I have to take these drugs to get rid of H. pylori?***

Depending on which antibiotic the doctors chooses, you need to take them for 1-2 weeks or as specifically directed. In some cases you may continue to take Prevacid or another acid blocking drug after the antibiotics are finished. Your doctor will explain this to you.

### ***What happens after I take the antibiotics?***

If you are careful to take these drugs exactly as your doctor prescribes, your ulcer will probably heal completely and not come back. In the majority of cases, healing takes 6-8 weeks. ***It is important to take these drugs exactly as directed, without missing any doses. Otherwise, some of the H. pylori bacteria may not be killed and your ulcer may not heal.***

### ***Does everyone with ulcers have H. pylori?***

No. Many ulcers are caused by the regular use of antiinflammatory drugs such as aspirin or ibuprofen. People who take these drugs on a long term basis may develop ulcers that have nothing to do with *H. pylori*. Ulcers are rarely caused by excess stomach acid secretion. (If you have this unusual condition, your doctor will tell you so.)

### ***Take H. pylori drugs exactly as instructed by your doctor.***

Don't take more than your are told, skip doses or double up doses. ***It is extremely important to take all doses so that the bacteria will be killed.*** If the bacteria are not all killed, your ulcer will not be cured, and the remaining bacteria will probably be more resistant than before.

This information is intended to help you better understand the ulcer treatments that are available. It is not intended to replace your physician's advice. You should work with your physician to determine the best way to meet your health care needs.