

Patient education: H. pylori infection (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is H. pylori infection? — H. pylori infection occurs when a type of bacteria called "H. pylori" infects a person's stomach.

Many people have H. pylori infection. Most of the time, H. pylori infection does not lead to any problems or cause any symptoms. But in some people, H. pylori infection leads to problems that can cause symptoms. These problems can include:

- Open sores, which are called "ulcers," on the lining of a person's stomach or duodenum – The duodenum is the first part of the small intestine ([figure 1](#)).
- Stomach cancer

These conditions can sometimes cause pain in the upper belly, bloating, nausea, or vomiting.

Doctors do not know why H. pylori infection leads to problems in some people and not others.

What are the symptoms of H. pylori infection? — Most people with H. pylori infection have no symptoms. But people who have ulcers can have symptoms that are caused by the ulcers. Common symptoms of ulcers can include:

- Pain in the upper belly
- Feeling bloated
- Feeling full after eating a small amount of food
- Not feeling hungry
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dark or black-colored bowel movements
- Feeling more tired than usual

Not all ulcers are caused by H. pylori infection. For example, people can get ulcers from taking certain pain-relieving medicines. But if you have the symptoms listed above, let your doctor or nurse know.

Is there a test for H. pylori infection? — Yes. Doctors can do different tests to diagnose H. pylori infection. These can include:

- Blood tests
- Breath tests – These tests measure substances in a person's breath after he or she has been given a special liquid to drink.
- Lab tests that check a sample of a bowel movement for H. pylori infection
- Biopsy – For this test, a doctor takes a small piece of tissue from the lining of the stomach. Then he or she looks at the tissue under a microscope. A doctor can do a biopsy during a procedure called an endoscopy. An endoscopy is a procedure that lets a doctor look at the inside lining of the esophagus, stomach, and duodenum.

Should I be tested for H. pylori infection? — You should be tested for H. pylori infection if you have symptoms and:

- Have an ulcer in the stomach or duodenum
- Have had ulcers in the past

Sometimes, doctors test people who have no symptoms for H. pylori infection if they have a family history of stomach cancer. Doctors also sometimes test people with symptoms who have never had an ulcer.

How is H. pylori infection treated? — H. pylori infection is treated with medicines. Most people need to take 3 or more medicines for 2 weeks. These can include:

- Medicines to reduce the amount of acid that the stomach makes – This can help cure the infection and help ulcers heal.
- Different types of antibiotics

People who are diagnosed with H. pylori infection should get treated, because treatment can:

- Help ulcers heal
- Keep ulcers from coming back
- Reduce the chance that an ulcer will get worse or lead to cancer

It is important to follow all your doctors' instructions about taking your medicines. Let your doctor or nurse know if you have any side effects or problems with your medicines.

What happens after treatment? — After treatment, most people have follow-up tests to check that the H. pylori infection has gone away. Follow-up tests can include:

- Breath tests
- Lab tests that check a sample of a bowel movement

Most of the time, H. pylori infection is cured with treatment. But sometimes, H. pylori infection is not cured with treatment. People who still have H. pylori infection after being treated might need to take more medicines.

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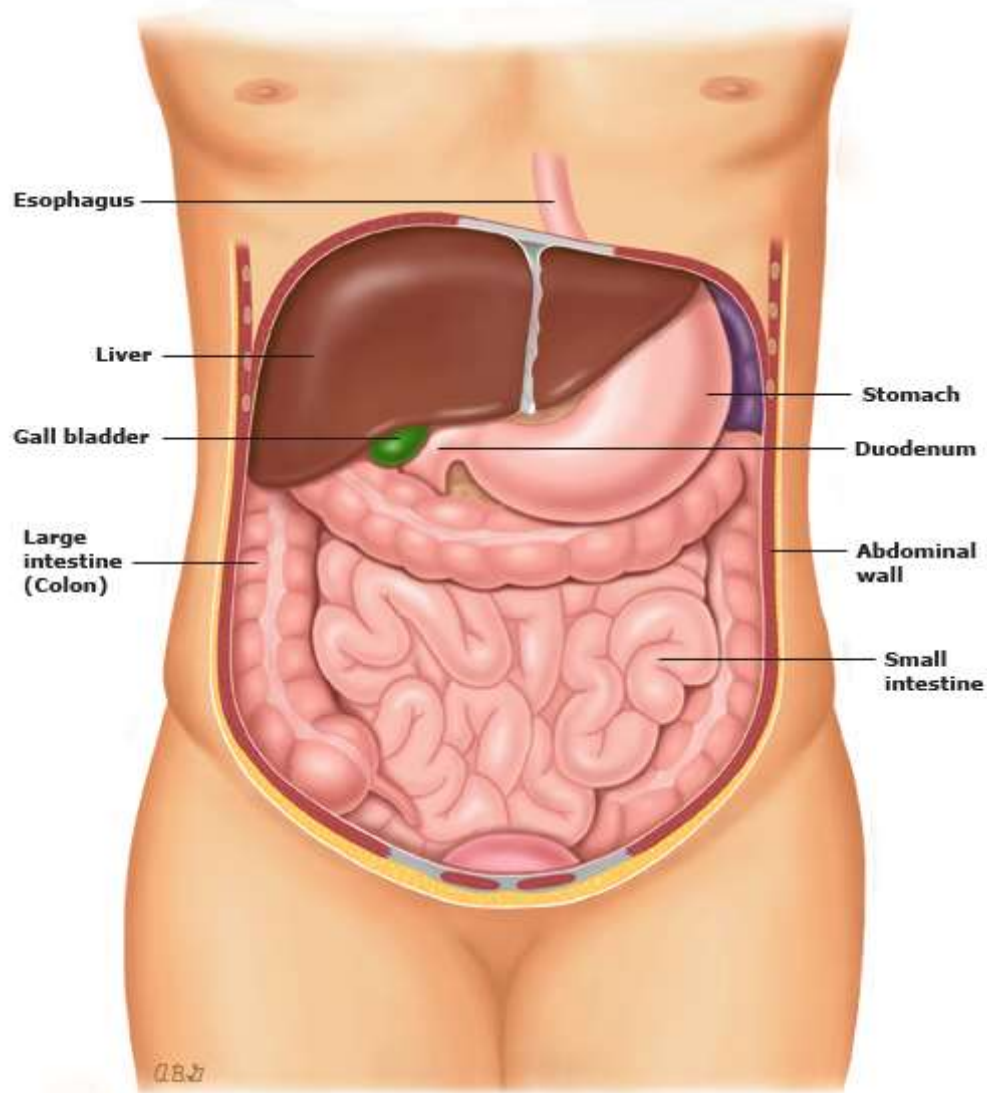
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GRAPHICS

Organs inside the abdomen (belly)



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