

ULCERS

What is a peptic ulcer? — A peptic ulcer is a sore that can form on the lining of the stomach or duodenum. The duodenum is the first part of the small intestine.

What are the symptoms of a peptic ulcer? — Some people with peptic ulcers have no symptoms. Other people can have symptoms that include:

- Pain in the upper belly – Ulcers in the stomach often cause pain soon after a person eats. Ulcers in the duodenum often cause pain or burning when a person's stomach is empty.
- Bloating, or feeling full after eating a small amount of food
- Not feeling hungry
- Nausea or vomiting

All of these symptoms can also be caused by other conditions. But if you have these symptoms, let your doctor know.

Sometimes, peptic ulcers can lead to serious problems. These include:

- Bleeding – This can cause smelly and black-colored bowel movements or vomiting blood.
- A hole in the wall of the stomach or duodenum – This can cause sudden and severe belly pain.

What causes peptic ulcers? — Common causes of peptic ulcers include:

- An infection in the stomach or duodenum caused by a type of bacteria called “H. pylori”
- Medicines called “nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs” (NSAIDs) – NSAIDs include pain-relieving medicines. [aspirin](#) and [ibuprofen](#)

Is there a test for a peptic ulcer? — Yes. If you have symptoms of a peptic ulcer, your doctor might do:

- Tests to check for H. pylori infection – Doctors can check for H. pylori infection by doing:
 - 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 the infection
- A procedure called an “upper endoscopy” – During an upper endoscopy, a doctor puts a thin tube with a camera on the end into a person's mouth and down into the

stomach and duodenum. Then he or she checks the lining of the stomach and duodenum for ulcers.

How are peptic ulcers treated? — Treatment depends on the cause, but most peptic ulcers are treated with medicines.

People with H. pylori infection are often treated with 3 or more medicines for 2 weeks to get rid of the infection. This treatment can include:

- Medicines to reduce the amount of acid that the stomach makes
- Different types of antibiotics

Some people need to take medicines that reduce the amount of acid for a longer amount of time. Some people take these medicines for the rest of their life.

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

People who have serious problems from their peptic ulcers might also need to be treated with surgery.

What happens after treatment? — After treatment, people often have follow-up tests. These can include:

- Tests to check that the H. pylori infection has gone away
- An upper endoscopy to check that the peptic ulcer has healed

What else can I do to help a peptic ulcer heal? — To help a peptic ulcer heal and to prevent future peptic ulcers, you can:

- Not smoke
- Not take NSAIDs (if possible)