



The Care Group, P.C.

New Approaches to Ulcers

By Gerard L. Guillory, M.D.

Did you know that most ulcers are caused by an infection, not by spicy foods, acid or stress?

One of the greatest medical discoveries of recent years occurred in the early 1980s, when Australian physician Barry J. Marshall found that the spiral-shaped bacteria helicobacter pylori were the cause of up to 90 percent of ulcers.

Some experts now think that helicobacter pylori may be the most common infection in the world. But not everyone who is infected has symptoms.

Helicobacter pylori cause ulcer disease and gastritis (inflammation of the stomach) and increase the chances of developing stomach cancer. Ulcers also can be caused by the ingestion of anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen and aspirin.

More than 25 million Americans will suffer from an ulcer at some point in their lives. The most common ulcer symptom is a burning sensation in the stomach, often relieved by the ingestion of food or antacids. Other symptoms can include nausea, bloating and bleeding in the gastrointestinal tract. One of the most common types of ulcer is the peptic ulcer, which consists of a sore or hole in the lining of the stomach or duodenum (i.e., the first part of the small intestine).

Helicobacter pylori are believed to be transmitted orally through the ingestion of food or water tainted with fecal matter. It is also possible that the bacteria can be transmitted orally in patients who reflux stomach contents.

In the past, ulcer patients were given medications such as Tagamet, Pepcid and Prilosec that are designed to block acid secretion. Although these medications might relieve the symptoms of ulcer disease and result in temporary healing, the symptoms often recur, because the underlying cause—helicobacter pylori—hasn't been eradicated. Today, patients can be treated for cure with two or more antibiotics along with medications that block acid secretion in the stomach.

At The Care Group, P.C., we test for helicobacter pylori in patients who have ulcer-type symptoms or a past history of ulcer disease. The diagnosis can be made through a blood test (that detects antibodies to the organism), a breath test, or via testing of a stool specimen. The diagnosis also can be made through endoscopy, whereby a video camera is inserted into the stomach and a biopsy specimen is taken.

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resident physicians, and nurse practitioner students. He has lectured extensively on the role of nutrition and disease. Over the years, he has fostered an interest in patient education and has authored three books on digestive troubles. He also has served as medical director of a Colorado-based health plan and as a health consultant to employer groups.