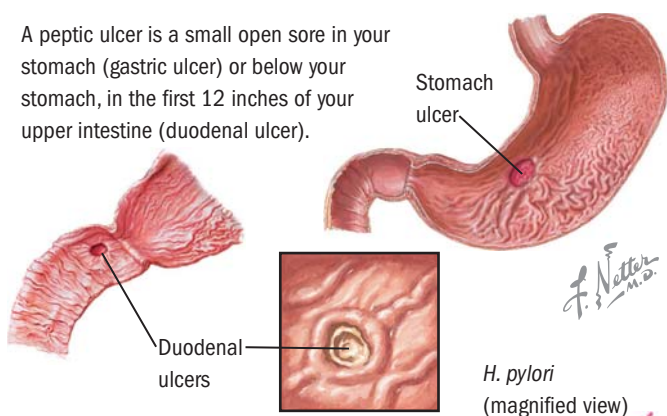
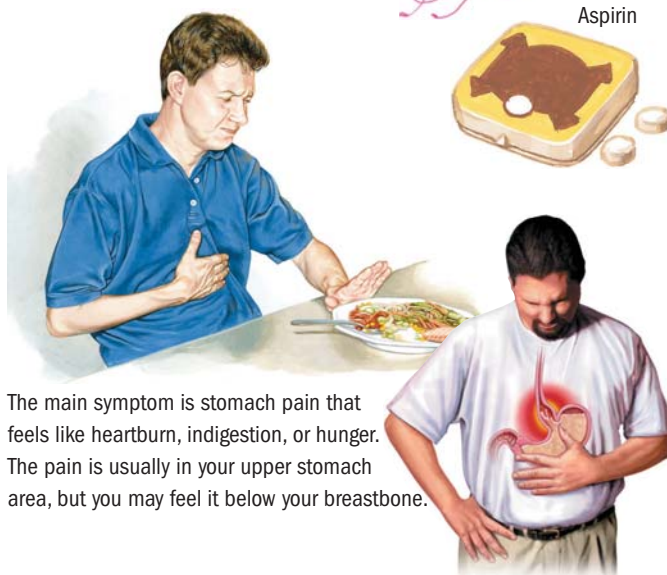
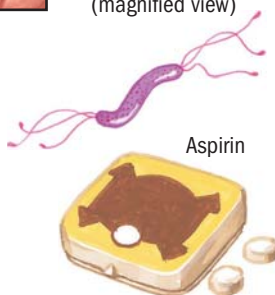


MANAGING YOUR PEPTIC ULCER

A peptic ulcer is a small open sore in your stomach (gastric ulcer) or below your stomach, in the first 12 inches of your upper intestine (duodenal ulcer).

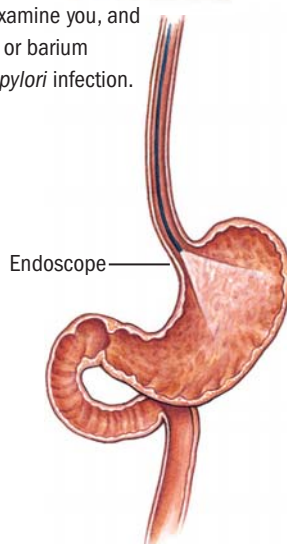


Causes include infection with *H. pylori*, taking aspirin or NSAIDs, and too much acid secretion.



The main symptom is stomach pain that feels like heartburn, indigestion, or hunger. The pain is usually in your upper stomach area, but you may feel it below your breastbone.

Your doctor will take your medical history, examine you, and order blood and stool tests and endoscopy or barium x-rays. Tests will tell whether you have an *H. pylori* infection.



What Are Peptic Ulcers?

Peptic ulcers are small open sores in the stomach or upper intestine. Sores occur when the lining of the stomach or intestine breaks down and exposes tissue underneath. Ulcers may be gastric (stomach) or duodenal (first 12 inches of the small intestine). Duodenal ulcers occur four times more often than gastric ulcers. Peptic ulcer disease (PUD) is common.

What Causes Peptic Ulcers?

Three things cause most peptic ulcers: infection with a bacteria named *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), taking aspirin or similar medicines (nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen), and too much acid secretion. Ulcers aren't contagious but may run in families. Smoking increases the risk of stomach ulcers.

What Are the Symptoms of Peptic Ulcers?

The main symptom is stomach pain that feels like heartburn, indigestion, or hunger. A burning, boring, or gnawing feeling can last from 30 minutes to 3 hours. It's usually felt in the upper stomach area, but it sometimes occurs below the breastbone. Pain usually happens when the stomach is empty. It can also occur right after eating or hours later, depending on the location of the ulcer.

Complications include bleeding and perforation (hole in the stomach or duodenum). Black, tarry stools and vomiting with blood or with what looks like "coffee grounds" material (blood mixed with stomach acid) indicate bleeding ulcers.

How Are Peptic Ulcers Diagnosed?

The doctor will suspect PUD from the medical history and physical examination. The doctor may order blood and stool tests. Endoscopy or barium x-rays may be done. For endoscopy, the better test, the doctor uses a lighted tube to see into the stomach and take a tissue sample for study. Tests will be done to see whether the stomach or duodenum has *H. pylori* infection.

Medicines reduce acid production in the stomach and treat *H. pylori* infection if you have one.



Avoid things that increase risk of PUD: aspirin, NSAIDs, smoking, and alcohol.



Call your doctor if you have diarrhea. Also call your doctor if you have blood in your stools or vomit or if stools are dark and tarry.



Don't drink caffeinated beverages or eat foods that make symptoms worse.



Tarry stools

How Are Peptic Ulcers Treated?

Treatment heals the ulcer, helps symptoms, stops relapses, and avoids complications. With treatment, people usually start to feel better in about 2 weeks. Relapses can occur if the risk factors persist.

Two treatment options are drugs and surgery. Medicines to reduce stomach acid include antacids, histamine-2 blockers such as ranitidine or famotidine, and proton pump inhibitors such as omeprazole. Sucralfate is another medication that can form a protective coating on the ulcer to help it heal. Antibiotics, proton pump inhibitors, and bismuth can be used for *H. pylori* infection.

Surgery is used when drugs don't work or serious complications occur. Today, surgery is rarely needed.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Peptic Ulcers:

- ✓ **DO** avoid things that increase the risk of PUD: aspirin, NSAIDs, smoking, and drinking alcohol.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have diarrhea.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if your vomit is bloody or looks like coffee grounds.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if blood is in your stools or stools are dark and tarry.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you are unusually weak or pale.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if pain doesn't get better with treatment.
- ⊗ **DON'T** change your medicine or dosage because you feel better unless your doctor tells you to.
- ⊗ **DON'T** smoke. Get help finding a smoking cessation program.
- ⊗ **DON'T** drink caffeine and eat foods that make symptoms worse.
- ⊗ **DON'T** drink alcohol.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American College of Gastroenterology
Tel: (703) 820-7400
Website: <http://www.acog.org>
- National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse
Tel: (800) 891-5389
Website: <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/digest/nddic.htm>