



Common misconceptions about gastric ulcer

Ulcer is a general term for a hole or break in the lining of surfaces in our body. While there are ulcers in different parts of the body such as the mouth and skin, the word ulcer is commonly associated with the ulcers in the digestive system, most commonly the stomach.

Ulcers in the digestive tract include the common **peptic ulcers**, which are located in the small intestine, the less common **gastric ulcer**, which is located in the stomach, and the relatively rare **esophageal ulcer**, which is located in the esophagus or the swallowing tube. Gastric ulcers are commonly associated with gnawing or burning pain in your middle to upper stomach, which can sometimes go away after you have eaten something. There are some misconceptions about ulcers that can contribute to their prevalence.¹

Spicy food and stress

Conventional wisdom attributes that the cause of ulcers is stress and the consumption of spicy food. In reality, spicy food and stress may intensify existing ulcer symptoms. This was made possible from the recent discovery that most ulcer cases are caused by a bacterium called *Helicobacter pylori*. This bacterium is able to live under the acidic environment of the stomach.

Before the discovery, it was thought that stress, genetics, and other lifestyle choices caused the increase of digestive acids that damage the protective lining of the stomach and cause ulcers.

Other possible causes that increase the risk of gastrointestinal ulcers are heavy alcohol use, smoking, and the overuse of over-the-counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen, aspirin, naproxen, acetaminophen, or paracetamol.^{1,2}

There is no link between kissing and ulcer

Since ulcer is caused by a bacterium, it can be transmitted from one person to another by kissing. The bacterium *H. pylori* can travel upwards the esophagus and into the mouth. When the bacterium is in the mouth, it can be transmitted through kissing and other means. The bacterium can also be spread by means of contaminated food and water.³

Ulcers make you feel worse after eating

Some use this misconception to try to diagnose if they have an ulcer. This is far from the truth since eating often makes you feel better because it neutralizes the acid that is irritating the ulcer. Common symptoms of people with ulcers include having the feeling of fullness, bloating, burping, weight loss, or vomiting.

Treatment is unnecessary

One should strive to be the healthiest version of themselves and should not be content to live in pain. Curing gastric ulcers will improve the patient's quality of life and reduce its chance to worsen and create a hole in the stomach. These worse conditions will require surgery. Another reason to treat ulcers is to prevent the risk of spreading the disease to other people.

The treatment for gastrointestinal ulcers has a very high success rate. Treatment options include antibiotic drugs that kill the causative bacteria and other drugs that help reduce the acidity of the stomach.

References:

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3rd floor, King's Court II Bldg, 2129 Chino Roces cor. Dela Rosa, Makati City 1231, Philippines